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March 12, 1895.

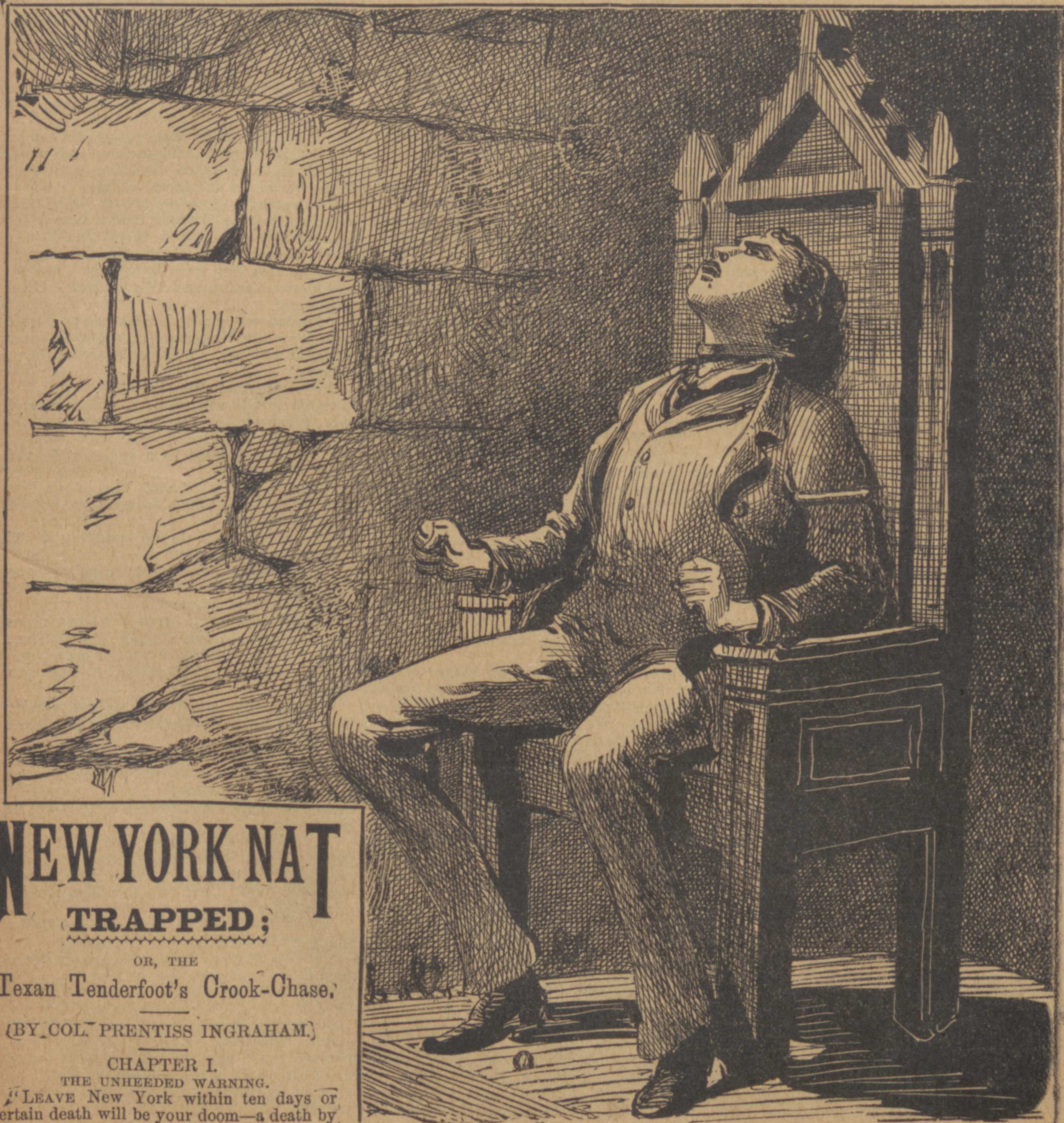
No. 920.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 cents.

Vol. XXXVI.



NEW YORK NAT TRAPPED;

OR, THE
Texan Tenderfoot's Crook-Chase.

(BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.)

CHAPTER I.

THE UNHEEDED WARNING.

"LEAVE New York within ten days or
certain death will be your doom—a death by
means most terrible."

NEW YORK NAT WAS LEFT TO HIS FATE.

"Though unknown to the chief of the Secret Service, and to the police, we know you, New York Nat."

"We know you as the chief of a secret band of Boy Police, of young Ferrets, guilty yourselves of crime, and under a false reformation, trying to cancel your past deeds by hunting down criminals less fortunate than you."

"We know that your band ferrets out more crime, runs down more guilty men than does the whole police force, and still keeping your identity known from those you serve so well, you are building up fortunes for yourselves in rewards offered for crooks, in blood-money, hoping some day you may enjoy the riches thus earned."

"We know that your band of young Ferrets is held together by iron-clad and deadly laws—that you have a place where you meet in secret, that you have a Girl Queen, or Mascot."

"But now that you are treading on dangerous ground, coming too near our haunts, we warn you what your doom will be, and that you must leave New York within the time named, or your death is certain."

"Go to another city and hunt down crooks, if you choose, but leave New York, where we claim a right to live upon others, to grow rich upon the gold of the rich, to care nothing for the misfortunes and sorrows of our victims, so that we prosper."

"So again we warn you that you must not attempt to hunt us down. Let your blood be upon your own head, for no mercy will be shown you, or your band, not even your Girl Queen. You will be blotted from the face of the earth, if you step not out of our way, for we have in our turn, turned detectives—we have spotted you, and are shadowing you to your doom, New York Nat!"

"THE VAMPIRES."

"Oh! Nat, when did you get this terrible warning?" and the one who had just read it turned pale and looked anxiously into the face of the youth who had just given her the threatening missive to read, for she was a young girl, beautiful in face and form—a woman, though scarcely over sixteen.

The youth laughed lightly at her fears, and responded:

"Why, Olive, for the first time in my life I see you frightened. You are as white-faced as the ghost those Vampires threaten to make of me."

"I would not have shown the letter to you, sis, had I thought you would be alarmed; I did so because I needed your help."

"My help, Nat?"

"Yes, as you have helped me time and again."

"To do what?"

"Run down those Vampires, to show them that I scorn their warning, that they can no more frighten us out of New York than they can stop the current of the grand old Hudson running at our feet."

"No, no, sweet sister mine, Mascot Queen of the Boy Ferrets, we have a mission to perform, a task begun that must be finished and we will do it in the face of all threats."

The words were earnestly uttered, and the face of the speaker lighted up with fearless determination as he spoke.

He was a young man, possessing a graceful, athletic form and a face at once intelligent, thoughtful and stamped with marked character.

He was well dressed, as was also the girl whom he had called sister, and there was a strong resemblance between the two.

They stood in a grove of majestic trees growing upon a high bank overhanging the Hudson River, and within the limits of New York City, but where the houses were few and far between.

A short distance from them, upon one of the upper streets not yet cut through to the

water front, was a small and neat cottage, and there the young girl had been seated when the youth came rapidly along and beckoned to her.

Throwing on a sun-hat she had quickly followed to the spot among the trees, and once there he had handed her the letter to read which had aroused her fears.

"But when did you get it, Nat?" she asked.

"It was addressed to me and given to the boy who helps Freckles at his news-stand, with the request that it be delivered to me in person."

"Was Freckles there?"

"No, but the boy gave it to him on his return. Last night he went up to the Rookery and left it for me, with a note stating how he got it."

"How strange! But, can the boy give no clue as to who left it?"

"I went to see Freckles this morning and gave him the letter to read, asking him to question the boy."

"Well?"

"He simply said that a young and very pretty girl left it there, giving him a dollar to see that it reached me."

"The boy does not belong to our band?"

"No."

"He does not know you, then?"

"No, for he could not tell the girl if I ever came there or not, but she said that I often did so, and that Freckles would know all about it and what to do with it."

"Nat, this means that our secret is known—that our League of Unknown Ferrets has been discovered, when we thought we were as unfathomable as death," said the girl impressively.

"It would seem so, sister, for I did not believe any one knew me as New York Nat, the Boy Ferret Captain, outside of our band and our two kind allies who so ably aid us."

"And now known, it means that we will be run down."

"No, oh, no; for I swear that those who threaten me shall be run down, and by the very ones they threaten with death if we dog them."

"The Vampires, be they who they may, have thrown down the gauntlet for war and war it shall be to the knife and knife to the hilt—I swear it!" and the voice of the young Ferret Captain rung as he uttered the words.

CHAPTER II.

A STARTLING RECOGNITION.

"PARDON me, but you are New York Nat?"

Nat started at the salutation and the words.

He was standing upon the corner of the street nearly opposite to the Hotel Brunswick, some two hours after leaving Olive at her up-town cottage home, and his bearing indicated that he was expecting some one.

He had been there some fifteen minutes, apparently waiting for a stage, yet he had allowed several to go by without hailing them, and to be suddenly accosted as he was, by a stranger, and to be called by a name known to but few, gave him a start, in spite of his nerve.

The stranger was a tall, sinewy, handsome young fellow, with the air of a Southerner, which his dress also bore out, for he wore a broad brimmed hat, and a Prince Albert coat buttoned over his breast.

His face was beardless, darkly-bronzed, bold and fearless, and in his eyes was a frankness that could not well be feigned.

"My name is Norton Chandler, sir," responded Nat, somewhat coldly.

"It may be, but New York Nat is his alias. You are the one I seek—nay, I mean you no harm, but rather good, so listen to me."

New York Nat was amazed that he should

be addressed in the street by the name known only to his band, but he said quietly, though watching closely for any move on the part of the other:

"Well, sir, granted that I do bear the nickname of New York Nat, what then?"

"Do you see yonder cab against the curb?"

"Yes, sir."

"The driver is not there, I having sent him on an errand, while I remained in the hack, half hidden on the back seat, for two men stopping near did not see me."

"They were talking earnestly, and you were the subject of their conversation, for they pointed to you."

"What they said was, in effect, as one told the other who you were, that you had been warned to leave town and if you did not heed you were to be hunted down and your doom was certain."

"Why not shadow him now and capture him?" asked one.

"The answer was:

"Oh, I know where to find him and he cannot disguise himself so as to hide from me and the other shadowers in our band. He will be run to the end of his rope, for we are not safe while he is at large."

"All the same I say, track him to doom now, for he will not heed the warning, you may be sure."

"Then the other man repeated what he had said about your being safe enough when wanted and then asked the other to go over to the St. James and have a drink."

"I watched them go across Broadway, and then, leaving the cab, I came here to inform you, for I did not think you looked like a criminal, while those men did, though I had an idea they were detectives. So now you know all and must act for yourself. Good morning!"

"Pardon me, sir, and allow me to thank you for your kindness. I think I know what the men are. Will you describe them, please?"

The stranger answered readily:

"One is tall and wears a mustache and side whiskers; the other is short, smooth-shaven and red-faced."

"Both are dressed in a sporty style and wear high hats."

"Thank you, sir," and New York Nat held out his hand, which the stranger grasped with the remark:

"I hope you are in no trouble and will come out of it all right."

"I hope so, sir," and Nat turned away as the stranger returned to his cab, the driver of which just then returned.

New York Nat had gone but a few paces when he saw a youth coming toward him, dressed in the uniform of a messenger boy.

Before this lad got to him Nat began to speak:

"Teaser, get a cab and follow yonder hack, and find out who the man is that hired it. Don't fail!"

"Yes, cap'n," answered the boy, neither one having halted or seemed to have spoken to each other in passing.

As New York Nat hastened on his way, he muttered:

"It is lucky that Teaser came just as he did, for I was between two fires, as I did not know whether to believe that man's story and follow those two men he spoke of, or to shadow him."

"Now I am all right, for there is no better shadower in the band than is Teaser."

"If that man is a fraud he belies his looks, for I like his face immensely."

"Now to see the two gentlemen in the St. James bar if they are there yet."

So saying, New York Nat walked rapidly across Broadway, entered the St. James. Proceeding direct to the toilet-room he found no one there, so at once began to make one of those lightning changes at which he was an adept.

He first removed his light slouch hat, and pocketing it replaced it by a black one of Derby shape, though a soft one.

His turn-down collar and dark tie were replaced by a high standing collar and red cravat, fastened together for a quick change.

A wig of grayish hair, spectacles, the turning of a double-made coat, light on one side, dark on the other, a short stick drawn from his hip-pocket, and drawn out into a long cane, with a pair of yellow gloves completely changed the appearance of New York Nat from the youth to apparently a man of forty, and the metamorphosis was not over a minute in taking place.

Then he sauntered out of the toilet-room, a slight stoop in his gait, and walking as though a trifle lame.

Entering the *cafe* he cast a searching glance around and beheld the two men described by the stranger buying cigars at the cashier's desk.

Instantly he stepped up and called for a cigar, for there was no mistake; the game he sought was right at his elbow; and in spite of the boast of one of them to know him in any disguise New York Nat read by their faces that he was not known.

CHAPTER III.

THE FERRETS AT WORK.

HAVING purchased a dozen of the best cigars each, one getting a twenty dollar, the other a ten-dollar bill changed to pay for them, the two men turned when Nat said in a low tone to the cashier:

"Look well at the face of those two men so that you can recognize them, and put those two bills they gave you away until I return for them."

The cashier looked surprised, glanced at Nat, nodded and then bent his gaze upon the two customers, who were standing a short distance away, talking in a low tone.

But, Nat, in passing near, overheard the remark of one of them:

"I tell you it was a mistake to let him go now, for if he knows anything he'll spring the trap and not leave. I know him!"

"I'll take all chances. He don't know enough to spring any trap and our warning will scare him away."

Nat heard no more but left the *cafe*, the two men coming out soon after.

They passed around into a side street, halting at the door of a large and handsome brown-stone house, which Nat knew to be a fashionable gambling resort.

"I would not dare follow them there, for they are as keen as a razor, and would soon know that I was shadowing them. Ah! I'll get Parson to dog them," and having seen the men enter the building, New York Nat hastened down to the corner of Twenty-third street, and asked to see one of his boys who was employed there.

"Parson, I need you, and quickly," he explained.

A minute later, Parson, a youth so named on account of his serious face, joined him outside.

"Go back and get a telegram—a bogus one, of course—and go up to C—'s gambling saloon on Twenty-sixth street.

"You will find there two men, one tall and wearing mustache and side-whiskers, the other short and smooth-faced. Both are dressed like sports and wear high hats.

"Shadow them in some way, if it takes a week, and come to a special meeting at the Rookery to-night, for we are being shadowed.

"Tell any of the boys you see about the meeting. Now go. I leave it to you to track them."

"I'll do it," was Parson's confident reply, and he returned to the telegraph office, while Nat went back to the gambling saloon to see if his suspects were still there.

He gained entrance by giving a private

pass-word, though he was not known to the cautious doorkeeper.

Entering the elegant parlors, he found the afternoon games of *faro* and *rouge et noir* just beginning. About a score of men were present, most of them of the fashionable society set, for the professional gambler does not play until night.

And there were his two men standing by the Fortune's wheel and betting liberally.

Nat wished to study their faces thoroughly, so he also took a place around the wheel of Fortune and put down some money upon a number, his position being such that he could distinctly scan the two men.

He was in luck for several turns; then lost; and so, as though afraid to risk more, he turned away just as he heard a voice behind him say:

"Well, he is not here yet, so I'll wait for him."

The speaker was Parson, who held an addressed telegraph envelope in his hand.

Nat gave a quick glance toward the two men to be spotted, and Parson, nodding that it was all right, passed over to a corner to sit down and wait for the coming of an imaginary person to whom the telegram was addressed.

Upon leaving the gambling saloon, New York Nat went to a fashionable hotel and sauntering about until he caught sight of the captain of the bell-boys, walked by him and said:

"A special meeting is called for to-night, Flip. Don't fail. It is most important."

"Lor, cap'n, I'd never have known you," averred the surprised and pleased Flip.

"I'm on a trail, and there are those on our trail, so don't fail to-night, and tell all the boys you can," and Nat passed on and out of the hotel.

Taking a Broadway car he rode up-town to a fashionable street among the forties, and as he reached the corner he saw a cab there and the well known face and form of Teaser.

"Ah! Teaser, on duty here?"

The boy started and said in a low tone:

"You scared me, for I did not know you in that rig."

"But where do you think my man is?"

"Where?"

"Do you see that carriage?"

"Yes."

"Well, he is in there."

"All right, I'll shadow him now, and you let all the boys know there is a special meeting to-night," and walking on Nat mused in a surprised way:

"Now what has he gone to Mr. Canfield's house for, I wonder?"

CHAPTER IV.

A SURPRISE FOR NAT.

WONDERING what could have carried the handsome young stranger, who had warned him against the two men he had been shadowing, to the house of Sherman Canfield, who was the ally of the Boy Ferrets, New York Nat ascended the broad stone steps and entered the elegant mansion with his own pass-key.

He heard voices back in the library and so went there, feeling assured that the stranger would not recognize him in his disguise.

There before the door was the hack the stranger had been in when he overheard the words of the two men about Nat, and wondered if his kind informant was not himself a detective and playing some deep game to entrap.

He would soon know, for Sherman Canfield * was his, Nat's, friend.

* Sherman Canfield, from Nebraska, was a border boy, whose life has been full of adventure and romance. For several years the boy pard of Buffalo Bill, he afterward became his private secretary and traveled with the great scout all over Europe. Mr. Canfield is now landlord of the Sheridan Inn at Sheridan, Wyoming.—THE AUTHOR.

Sherman Canfield, a Nebraskan, had come to New York on business that was detaining him there for months, and the friend of Walter Vanderlip, the bachelor owner of the mansion, had been persuaded by that gentleman to live there during his forced absence, while he had also become the ally of New York Nat and his Ferrets, who communicated only through him with the chief of the Secret Service, keeping their identity wholly unknown to all else.

To the chief Nat was known only as the Unknown Detective, and every effort of the regular force, detectives and police, had been thus far unable to solve the mystery regarding him and how he obtained the very valuable information he was constantly supplying the chief with, for Sherman Canfield was sworn to secrecy.

With a key to the handsome bachelor quarters where Canfield dwelt, Nat felt perfectly at home there, and no matter what his disguise, was accustomed to enter unannounced day or night, in fact there was a room kept there always at his disposal.

Entering the library Nat found there two gentlemen engaged in earnest conversation.

One was a fine-looking young man of twenty-five or six, a blond, with a striking face and expressive blue eyes, while he was in dressing-gown, smoking-cap and slippers that were very becoming.

The other was the stranger who had accosted him in the street and so startled him.

Sherman Canfield looked up quickly and surprised at the entrance of an apparent stranger, but quickly caught the signal of Nat that told him who he was, enabling him to penetrate his disguise at once, for he was accustomed to seeing the young Ferret in all manner of costumes.

"Ah, Mr. Chandler, I am glad to see you—my friend Mr. William Palmer, of Texas, and of whom you have heard me speak."

Mr. Palmer arose and in his courtly way shook hand warmly with Nat, not suspecting, in his disguise, that he had seen him little over an hour before.

Nat expressed pleasure at seeing him, and as he took a seat, with his back to the light said:

"Yes, Mr. Canfield, you have told me of Mr. Palmer, and that you visited him upon his fine ranch in Texas, as also that he was quite a hero in the Lone Star State, as an Indian-fighter and captain of Ranch Rangers."

"Ah, Canfield, you have been covering me with glory it seems, for my heroism consisted only in protecting my cattle from redskins and keeping my home from being robbed by Mexican raiders across the Rio Grande, while my captaincy is over some score of ranchmen like my self, banded together for mutual protection—that is all, Mr. Chandler."

"You are too modest for a tenderfoot, Will; but about what you were speaking to me about, let me tell you that this is the very gentleman into whose hands I was going to intrust your case."

"Indeed! as I understood you it was a very young man, who was a detective."

"True, and this is the one."

"Shall I tell him why you have come to New York?"

"Certainly, for I am a good deal of a stranger here, Sherman, and came to you for advice and aid."

"You shall have it, and more, I can almost pledge you that when my friend here undertakes your case he will win."

"See here, Chandler, Palmer, as I told you, is a Texan and a ranchman, and has come to New York on a most important affair and you are the man to help him out."

"I will be glad to do so, sir, especially as I have met Mr. Palmer before and owe him a debt of gratitude, not to speak of his being your friend."

"You have met me before?" asked Will Palmer* in great surprise.

"Yes, sir; but first to your mission to New York, and then I will explain?" answered Nat with a smile.

"It is told in a nut-shell.

"One of my neighbors was a Mexican with an American wife, and a most beautiful daughter.

"The Mexican was said to be very rich, but the truth of whether he was or not no one knew.

"He was very unpopular with his neighbors, while his wife and daughter were loved by all who knew them.

"Some months ago there came to our country, from Chicago it was said, a handsome fellow with apparently plenty of money.

"He was a fascinating fellow, said he intended to live there, and did buy a ranch and cattle but did not pay for them, it now turns out.

"The young lady I spoke of, having refused a score of us fellows, fell desperately in love with this stranger, and two months ago eloped with him.

"Then it turns out that Don Felipe Maximo, her father, was murdered that same night, the mother wounded dangerously with a knife, and the Mexican's money, and other riches in jewels, which he kept buried, were stolen.

"As the stranger had never paid for his ranch or cattle, and the murder of Maximo and wounding of his wife took place the night he left, suspicion turned upon him, and was added to by Mrs. Maximo's muttered words:

"I know the murderer and the robber—God help my poor child."

"Now, Mr. Chandler, I am here on the track of that man."

CHAPTER V.

NAT'S PLEDGE.

NEW YORK NAT listened with deep attention to the young Texan's strange story.

First, he was glad to find out that he had not a foe in Will Palmer, as he had feared, and then he was pleased with the knowledge that he was one of Sherman Canfield's friends, and he could serve him, while he was also glad to get the case that was put in his hands.

So he asked quietly:

"What was the name of the man, Mr. Palmer?"

"He was known to us as Leonard Long."

"Had you any reason to suspect that he was crooked while he was there?"

"None whatever, though he was generally disliked by the young men; but that was because he won Myrtle Maximo's love, and cut us all out, for I confess I was smitten along with the rest.

"One young rancher went so far as to pick a quarrel with him, challenge him to fight a duel, and got killed as a result."

"It was in a country of ranches?"

"Yes, with a little village about the center of half a hundred good ranches."

"Where did Mr. Long live while there?"

"At the tavern, in the village, where he had the very best the place afforded."

"Was it not strange that he was able to elope with the girl and not be caught, especially as he was suspected of a double murder?"

"He had planned well, the young lady going to visit at a ranch miles away.

"Maximo and his wife were murdered early in the evening, a servant woman stating that Long had come there, and been told

by them to go and bring Myrtle home, for it was a beautiful moonlight night.

"There was a fandango on the ranch that night, at the cowboys' quarters, and the servant girl I spoke of had gone there, leaving old Maximo and his wife alone, and so the murder was not discovered until the return of the servants just before dawn, when they found the house open, the lights all burning.

"Then the news spread rapidly, and when sent after it was found that Myrtle had left for home about ten o'clock with Leonard Long.

"They had by that time over twelve miles' start and were tracked to the Rio Grande the next day, but a rain-storm had washed out all traces, and not then being suspected of more than eloping with the girl, there was no further pursuit.

"It was as days wore on that he was suspected, when the robbery was discovered, and the often-repeated words of Mrs. Maximo, who still lies in a critical state.

"Then it was remembered that several of the ranchers' homes had been robbed by some mysterious person, of gold and jewels, several men with large sums of money had been held up at night by a masked horseman and forced to deliver up all they had of value, and in three instances where resistance had followed the demand, they had been shot dead and been left lying in the trail.

"Who this mysterious masked horseman was no one could discover, but after Leonard Long's flight many thought that he was the man, for his size, hair and general appearance were the same as his."

"And why did you come to New York in search of him instead of going to Chicago?"

"That was on account of some of my own detective work, for in going over his rooms in the tavern I found two slips of paper, here they are, and one simply gives the address of a hotel in this city, the name having been burned off, while the other has the words:

"Address to the same old number in Union Square, and believe me as ever,

"Yours fraternally,

"LUCAS SWIFT,

"of the D— Vs."

and handing the two slips of paper to New York Nat to read, Will Palmer continued:

"I also went to the postmaster of the village in my Secret Service work and he told me, after close questioning, that he remembered that Long's letter's came regularly, one each week, and they always bore the New York post-mark, and he only wrote to one person, and that one was in New York, but he could not recall the name.

"I then wrote down a dozen names for him to look over and he at once hit upon the one I have mentioned—Lucas Swift.

"Upon this I decided to come to New York, for at a meeting of the ranchmen I was selected to try and find Long, and if guilty bring him back for trial.

"I have told my friend Canfield, as I have told you, Mr. Chandler, and I asked him to direct me to a good detective agency here, and he spoke of a young friend of his who was not connected with the regular force, but who could find my man if anyone could, and fortunately you just then came in; but you say that we have met before?"

"First tell me, Mr. Palmer, if you have a photograph of your man?"

"Unfortunately I have not, but here is a perfect description of him which I wrote down, giving his peculiarities as well."

"Thank you," said Nat taking the paper, and then he added:

"Yes, Mr. Palmer, I will undertake to find Leonard Long, and more, I will pledge you that I will do so."

"That is a bold statement, Mr. Chandler."

"It is one I mean—I pledge to find your man," was the determined response of New York Nat.

CHAPTER VI.

A DOUBLE DUTY.

"If you have his pledge he will do it," Will," said Sherman Canfield when Nat had spoken, and it flashed through the mind of the ally of the young Ferret Captain that he had made some discovery through seeing the slip of paper that caused him to make the pledge.

"Somehow I believe that you will," said Will Palmer thoughtfully, and he added:

"And I want you to call upon me for all aid I can render, for I am here to stay until Leonard Long is found and known to be guilty or innocent.

"The ranchmen made up a liberal purse to pay all expenses, and if that goes I have a generous bank account of my own, so command me for what sums are needed, while let me tell you that there is a reward offered by the State, another by the county and a third by the citizens for the murderer of Maximo, and the other murders I spoke of, and these will be an incentive for better work by the detectives.

"Now tell me what I can do to aid you, but first let me know where we have met before?"

"You will let me swear you to secrecy?"

"Certainly."

"And then, in aiding me in detective work you will be governed by me?"

"Assuredly, for I am a tenderfoot in the work here."

Nat quietly took off his coat and turned it, drew from his pocket his other hat, shut up his telescopic cane and pocketed it, and then removed quickly his gray wig and spectacles, while he straightened his form to his accustomed erect way of holding himself.

"By the Star of Texas! you are the youth I warned several hours ago of a seeming plot to down you!" cried the amazed Texan.

"I am, sir, New York Nat!"

"Canfield, I meant to tell you about it, only my own affairs were first talked over.

"I jumped into a hack to come here, but before the driver left the stand, I wrote a card and sent him back to the hotel to get my cane from my room, and seated in the carriage I overheard the conversation of two men who halted there and discovered this young man, who stood just across the street.

"As I did not wish him to be trapped, when the men walked away I crossed over and told him, and only to think he is your detective, and that we should meet in your house."

"I had you shadowed here, sir, for I was not sure you were not trapping me, while, acting upon your information I went to the St. James, changed my colors and saw the two men, and I now have one of my boys shadowing them."

"Are they detectives?"

"They may be, sir."

"Come, Nat, you know who the men are?" said Sherman Canfield with a smile.

"Well, sir, as I know Mr. Palmer to be a friend now, in fact, as he is one of us, so to speak, I will read you this letter, and tell you how I received it."

Then Nat read the warning communication, which had been left for him at Freckles's newsstand, and which he had shown to Olive, and he added:

"Now I at first supposed that a clique of detectives here had gotten onto us, in some way discovered that I was chief of the Boy Police band, and took this way to scare us off."

"It may be so, Nat, for I know the chief says his men are very curious of the Unknown Ferrets who supply him with so much valuable information," Sherman Canfield remarked.

"It may be, sir, but I doubt it, for Mr. Palmer heard the two men say that a warn-

* William B. Palmer of Newark, N. J., but a Virginian by birth, Mr. Palmer went West and South when in his teens, and met with many adventures in the Indian Territory, Wyoming, Arizona and New Mexico, and then on a ranch in Texas.—THE AUTHOR.

ing had been sent me, and I was doomed if I did not heed it.

"Now if those two men are detectives it is in the interest of crime not against it."

"Ah!"

"They are, in my opinion, though I never saw them before, sporty crooks, that is, men who are playing the gentleman, but for their own game."

"Somewhere, I do not recall now when and where, I have heard the name on this slip of paper given me by Mr. Palmer."

"Lucas Swift?"

"Yes, sir, and you observe that he signs his name 'yours fraternally,' and that would imply that he and Leonard Long belonged to the same order or band, while he adds 'of the D. Vs.'"

"Now, the warning sent to me was from the Desperado Vampires, and is it a coincidence, or is it that Lucas Swift and Leonard Long are D. Vs., whatever that may mean, as these two men Mr. Palmer warned me against this morning certainly are."

"Nat, again I say you are a wonder," said Sherman Canfield.

"Indeed, you are, for your reasoning is most convincing, and after all Leonard Long may be one of this band of Vampires, who go about the country living upon others, and who have their headquarters in New York."

"Yes, Mr. Palmer, that is my idea of it, and while tracking down your man I may be doing double duty in ferreting out the Desperado Vampires; but let me say to you now that you must disguise yourself while in New York if you seek success."

"Disguise myself, but how can I?"

"Most readily."

"Get glasses with plain glass in them, change your style of dress, your hat, and allow your beard to grow, keeping in your hotel until it is a week or ten days old, and my word for it that your most intimate friend seeing you now would not recognize you then."

"I'll do it."

"Come here as my guest, Will, for I can make you most comfortable and you will be right on hand to be of service if Nat needs you."

"I'll do that too, Sherman, and thank you."

And so it was arranged that Will Palmer should go to the hotel and send his trunk up to the house, becoming Sherman Canfield's guest.

"Now, Nat, what about that warning?" asked Canfield.

"I am going to have a special meeting to-night, sir, and we will seek other quarters, for I am not going to let them catch me napping, and if they know who New York Nat is they will not see him around very soon, so will suppose they have run him out of town," and Nat laughed lightly as he arose to depart.

CHAPTER VII.

THE HOUSE OF ILL-OMEN.

THE sky was overcast when Nat left the house of Sherman Canfield and rain was threatening.

He took the Elevated railroad up-town and got off at a station where the town was little built-up, and where several old time mansions were yet to be seen.

One of these, situated in a growth of large trees, and with large grounds about it upon three sides, a long deserted graveyard being upon the fourth, could hardly be seen on account of the dense foliage about it, the ornamental trees and hedges being overgrown.

The old mansion had a bad name, as having been the scene of several murders and tragic deeds, and the story was believed by many that it was haunted, its history and

nearness to the graveyard giving rise to these rumors.

Surrounded by a high brick wall, the foot of man was believed never to trespass in the spooky grounds, and yet Nat, watching that no one was in sight, leaped over into the yard and disappeared among the shadows of the dense foliage.

Approaching the rambling old mansion he took a key from his pocket and entered by the cellar-door, which he unlocked.

All was darkness within, but strange steps were heard rapidly descending the stairs, and as Nat passed into the hall he saw in the dim light the form of an enormous dog.

"Always on the watch. Guard," he said, as he laid his hand upon the head of the savage brute, and going up-stairs, the dog trotted close at his heels.

Reaching the third floor, Nat entered a large room that had the appearance of a lodge chamber, for a table was there, a lamp, two chairs and a number of benches.

The windows were closed up so that no light could shine out, and only the skylights in the roof of the house enabled him to see his way.

Opening into the assembly-room was a smaller one, and this was well-furnished, for the house had not been stripped of its ancient furniture.

This room was evidently still used as a bed-chamber and adjoining it was a room where there was a fire-place, some cooking utensils, a table and chairs.

Some one dwelt there, and whoever it was cared nothing for the haunting memories hovering about the old rookery.

Standing in the bedroom, New York Nat glanced about him for a minute, a sad light settling upon his face.

"Well, old home, we have got to part company, for I have got to leave you," he mused.

"You have indeed been a home to me, and the ghosts the superstitious peopled you with never have bothered me."

"If I am known as New York Nat it will not be safe to remain here under any name or disguise, so go I must."

"But where?"

For a long while he pondered and then said thoughtfully:

"I could go back to the first home I had here, in the large vault in the adjoining graveyard, but then the boys would not like that, for they always stood in awe of going there, and I guess most of them will be glad that I have to move from here, for they were always looking for spooks when they came."

"But where to go is the question—ah! I have it, for I will still keep up my name for loving old rookeries that are haunted, and go to that large old mansion near Central Park where several persons have been murdered and which can be rented cheap, yes, at one fourth its value."

"It is secluded, vacant lots are opposite, and it is convenient."

"I have noticed it often, and I have heard that it was furnished, even to a piano, and belongs to a rich woman whose daughter was killed there, so that she will never enter it again."

"I will go down at once to see the agent, pay him several months in advance, get the key, and the boys can help me move in to-night, without any fuss."

So saying Nat quickly left the old rookery, and within an hour he was ascending the steps of a fine old residence, five stories high, and upon the front door of which some one had written, with chalk, in large letters:

"THE HOUSE OF ILL OMEN!"

Nat found the dust of long disuse and neglect upon everything, but the furniture, though worn was handsome, and the house was fully furnished.

In one of the bedrooms was a dark stain that had never been washed from the floor,

and the agent told him that this was the room where the young girl had been mysteriously murdered three years before, no clue to her murderer ever having been found.

"As you say you are not superstitious, and don't mind the stories about the house," said the agent, "I will tell you that the first owner of the house was also killed here, or rather it was supposed took his own life, and there was a servant who worked here also died under mysterious circumstances, and these happenings have given the place a bad name, so that I cannot rent it even though I offer it at fifty dollars a month, furnished."

"I will take it, sir, for it suits me, and I wish to open a school of music here. I will pay you three months in advance, and close the bargain at once," said Nat in his energetic way, and having pocketed the money the agent said to himself, with a grim smile:

"If he don't see ghosts there he'll be lucky, for the house is certainly under a ban of ill omen."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GATHERING OF THE CLAN.

FROM the house he had just rented New York Nat returned to the home of Mrs. Herbert, where his sister boarded, and he took his meals, with remarkable irregularity, however, and going up to Olive's room, he said:

"Well, sis, I have news for you?"

"What is it, Nat?"

"I am going to move."

"You dread to remain longer in the Rookery, after that letter, then?"

"Yes, though my place of abode may not be spotted, but New York Nat certainly is, as I have found out to-day other than through that letter."

"But, Nat, where can you move?"

"I'll tell you, and though the place is known as the House of Ill Omen it was a lucky thought of mine to go there, while one who has lived in a vault and an old rookery said to be haunted by ghosts, goblins, spooks, and I know by bitter memories and rats, should not be over particular about a place that has another unsavory reputation."

"Then it has a hard name, too?"

"You shall be the judge," and Nat told the stories about the house, and added:

"Here is my key and my receipt for three months' rent."

"I stepped in as I came up to see a locksmith and he is to put me a new spring lock on the door, and fit to it half a dozen keys, and from other men of the trade I can get other keys made until I have one for you and each member of the clan."

"I also bought some bedding and a few other things needed, and they will be sent at a certain hour to-morrow, when I will be there, while the boys will move me down to-night."

"You will stay there to-night, Nat?"

"Oh, yes, Guard and I, and to-morrow I'll make myself comfortable, with your aid, and you'll find a piano there and can come and play on it all you please, as well as your guitar and banjo, for you must know I am to be known as Professor Herman Spinola. Get on to my make up, sis, and do you not observe that I speak with a foreign accent," and Nat having rigged up with his iron-gray wig, spectacles, and a false hump on his shoulders, looked every inch a German professor.

"Nat, you are such a fraud when you want to be you even deceive me," said Olive.

"I'm glad, for then I can deceive any one if I escape your bright eyes."

"Why, you should have heard my broken English to the agent, and I have ordered a sign painted which reads:

"PROFESSOR HERMAN SPINOLA.

"TEACHER OF VOCAL AND INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC—

"Piano, Guitar, Violin, Flute and Banjo a Specialty.

"Lessons from 9 to 12 A. M.
2 to 5 P. M."

"Olive, that sign will paralyze you when you see it on my door."

"Oh, Nat! I know that you play all the instruments you have named, but you play by ear and do not know a note of music."

"My dear sis, don't get frightened, for it is easy enough to refuse any real pupils who might apply, and you, in different disguises seen entering my school of music, and the gang, will serve as make-believe pupils."

"You play the piano and violin, I drum on half a dozen instruments, Parson plays several, Flip is a banjoist, half a dozen of the boys sing, so do you, and between us all we can let the neighbors know that there is a school of music in the House of Ill Omen, while I will, in Professor Herman Spinola, sink New York Nat and thus have dodged my shadowers."

"Nat, you are right, as you always are, and no better place or plan could have been hit upon."

"Yes, get the boys to move you down to-night, and to-morrow I will come in and make you comfortable in your new quarters, and let me add that I feel greatly relieved now that you can elude those horrid Desperado Vampires, and Guard will be a protection to your new home."

"Oh, yes, I can teach him to howl while I run the school, and people going by will think he is some fashionable dude singing classical music."

Olive laughed at Nat's criticism of classical music, and the two went out together to the bank and sat looking at the sunset beyond the Palisades, and the vessels gliding up and down the broad waters of the grand old Hudson.

The tinkling of a bell called them in to supper, where Mrs. Herbert had a most tempting repast set out for them, and which both enjoyed as they were blessed with good appetites.

Soon after supper the brother and sister left the cottage together, Olive enveloped in a long cloak, and wearing a flesh mask over her face, as to not one of the band had she ever revealed herself, as Nat deemed it best that she should not be known to any one of the Ferrets other than as their Girl Queen, and the Masked Mascot, and no one ever knew her as she really was.

Reaching the wall they passed over it into the grounds, the rain, which had begun falling at night fell, pattering dismally upon the leaves, while the old Rookery loomed up before them black, silent and gloomy, looking indeed like the abode of spooks.

Entering the cellar door and ascending the stairs they found some of the Ferrets already there and others soon began to drop in by twos and threes, for, brave as they were, the boys did not care to venture alone in the Haunted House, as the place was known in the neighborhood.

CHAPTER IX.

THE "UNKNOWN'S."

THE gathering was a queer one, made up as it was of all classes, conditions, sizes and types of New York youths and boys, from wharf-rats to newsboys and bootblacks, bell-boys and messengers, sharpers and toughs of a juvenile kind.

And this Clan had been splendid material to work with just as they were being worked.

True as steel to their Clan and comrades,

devoted to their chief, with pride in their League, rejoicing that they were keeping their secret from the police, and out-doing the detectives at their own game, they were glad to remain unknown and work *sub rosa*.

They loved their Girl Queen, to them unknown, and had harm befallen her, they would have considered it a blow they could never recover from.

Though many of them looked untidy and wore patched clothing, they were conscious in the knowledge that they each one had a bank account ranging up among the hundreds, and that their treasury, the strong-box of their League, held thousands of dollars, theirs on equal terms, while the uncollected rewards the chief of the Secret Service kept in his keeping, subject to the demand of his "Unknown Ferrets," through Sherman Canfield, ranged up to a very large figure.

Wild horses could not have dragged their secret from them, and they were true to their oath of allegiance, their chief, their Girl Mascot, and themselves.

Such was the Unknown Detective Clan of youths that gathered in the assembly-room of the old Rookery, where their captain, New York Nat, had so long had his home.

Taking one of the seats behind the table, while Olive took the other, New York Nat called the meeting to order, and then the Girl Queen began to call the roll.

There was not one absent. Then "reports" were the next in order, and each one that had anything to say of any discovery he had made, arose and had his say, Olive jotting it down.

Then "accounts" were gone over, the weekly salaries paid, for each one was allowed so much for living expenses, and they were asked if they needed any more for any special duty on hand.

Accounts were never disputed, for each and all were implicitly trusted.

The business of the meeting being over with, New York Nat arose and said in his quiet, yet impressive way:

"Comrades, you are called together for a special reason other than the work that has just been gone through with."

"That reason is a letter which I will read to you, and which will tell you that some one outside of the band knows me as New York Nat."

"Other clans might at once suspect a traitor in our midst, but such a thought never will enter the head of any one of our comrades who is true to himself and our League."

"In some way I have been spotted, and I am glad that I am the one instead of you."

"I have read this letter to our ally, through whom I make my reports to the chief of the Secret Service, and he agrees with me that this is no longer a safe place for us."

"He held the idea that the letter might have come from some Detective Agency who were envious of us, and I held at first to the same opinion."

"But I have changed my views, and believe it comes from a band of crooks who play the detective upon detectives to protect themselves, who have a band of shadowers shadowing the officials to escape the clutches of the law for their crimes."

"They have discovered our League in some way and there is but one way for us to do."

"We must fight the Devil with fire, and not wait for more about us to be discovered, but set to work at once to find who this secret foe is."

"That is the main duty now of the band, and I will give you also a side issue to work upon as well, and one which will pay well in rewards if we unearth it; but the line of work for this duty is not yet mapped out for you."

"Our first step is to move from here."

"We must not be caught napping."

Nat paused for he saw that his words created a decided sensation.

Move from the Rookery yes, was in every mind.

But move where and when, was the next thought.

"I have already found a place and a good one, and we move to-night."

"Each one of you can take something with him when he goes, and carry it to our new haunt."

"I will soon join you and show you where to place the things."

"Parson will have the key to let you in, and each one will be admitted with his bundle as he arrives, and wait there for my coming."

"I will have keys for all of you to-morrow, so that you can come in as here, and there will be quarters there for you to sleep when caught out."

"I have rented the house furnished, paying three months in advance, with privilege of a year and longer, for the agent is glad to rent it, as it, like this, has the name of being haunted."

"Some of you know it as the House of Ill Omen."

"As New York Nat I will be ever known to you, but there I am Professor Herman Spinola, teacher of vocal and instrumental music."

"Now, comrades, gather our belongings together, the Queen showing you what you are to take, and here is the address of our new home, and I will read you the letter of warning, as well for you to consider, and then you are to go on the hunt for the Desperado Vampires."

The letter was read, the address was given of the House of Ill Omen, and while the boys were getting together their separate bundles, New York Nat called Parson aside and said:

"Now, to know about the two sports you shadowed to-day."

CHAPTER X.

THE SHADOWER'S REPORT.

"THEY were hard ones to shadow, Cap'n Nat, for they not only had their eyes on everybody else, but were always on the alert for any one who might be watching them," said Parson.

"I saw that, and I knew your task was not an easy one; but tell me what you discovered?"

"Well, they played the game at C——'s for an hour, and one changed a one-hundred, the other a fifty, to get the V to put on the cards, and though the dealer did not notice the money, as he had plenty more bills of the same amount, it struck me that their money was queer."

"No doubt of it; but did they win or lose?"

"The tall man lost all the time, the little man won, and his winnings were double the losses of the other."

"So that with the counterfeit money and the winnings of the one they came out well ahead?"

"Yes, some hundreds."

"And then?"

"They left the place and I followed them."

"They got a drink in the Sturtevant House and then taking a cab drove up-town and stopped at a fashionable flat house, keeping their cab waiting."

"I sprung the telegraph dodge on the janitor, and found that they were visiting a rich young swell who lived there, and his name is Benedict Mildmay."

Nat jotted down the name and the address of the apartment house and then asked:

"Where did they go from there, Parson?"

"They drove down to Union Square and went in to Tiffany's, being there half an hour."

"Then they took another cab, for no other

reason that I could see than to throw any one off their track, but I got the number of the cab they left, and the other one too."

"Good!"

"Where did they go?"

"Down to Chatham Square, and when they got out of their cab they had changed their rig, different hats, coats turned, even their pants, one wore spectacles, the tall man had no beard, the little man had whiskers, and I tell you it was an old dodge, Cap'n Nat, but it was the slickest and best change I ever saw, for I would have sworn the tall man's beard was not false."

"They looked like sporty gents when they entered the cab and came out the picture of Bowery toughs."

"Did they not suspect you, or see you?"

"Oh, I had not been idle in changes, and I had employed two carriages, a one horse cab, and a two horse hack, one to follow the other."

"When they left their cab I changed also, and I drove by them on their way down into the slums."

"I saw them halt a policeman, and whether he knew their racket or not I cannot say, but they gave him some money I'll swear to."

"You should have gotten his number."

"Here it is, and I've got his face photographed in my mind."

"Good for you."

"When I got out of my hack I had changed too, for I had turned my clothes, and that makes a sailor rig you know."

"I had put on a wig, too, bronzed my face by the glass in the back, and with my sea cap looked very little like the one they had seen in the gambling saloon."

"Of course they did not suspect one of my youth of shadowing them."

"There is our strong point—we are boys really, but old men when we wish to so disguise ourselves."

"You tracked them to their den?"

"Not exactly."

"They went into a saloon, here is the address, and after waiting some time for them to come out, I went in also."

"There were a dozen men there, but those two had gone, but they had not passed out by the door."

"The saloon is the entrance to their den then."

"So I took it, as after a couple of hours' waiting there they did not come out."

"I ordered drinks and cigars right along, treating the landlord each time, read the papers, and told him I was waiting for a friend."

"He asked me if I was just home from a cruise, and said that he had good rooms upstairs, but I dared not ask about the two men."

"You did right, and that will come later."

"Of course I threw the drinks in the spittoon, and the cigars I gave to a fellow in the telegraph office whom I do not like."

"That's all I can tell you, Nat, but I'll go there again whenever you wish."

"I may wish you to; but to-morrow look up those cabmen and see if they were not paid in counterfeit money."

"I will."

"Also go to Tiffany's, show a detective badge, and find out what those fellows were doing there."

"Yes."

"And report to me at the new quarters to-morrow night, if I do not see you during the day at the office."

"Now you know the House of Ill Omen, here is the key, so go there, taking a lantern and let the boys in as they arrive, for I will see the Girl Queen home and soon join you."

"All right, I'll be on hand when you come, and it's a good night to move it is storming so and no one will be out that is

not forced to be," and seeing that the boys were all ready Parson called out:

"All ready."

The Ferrets saluted their Girl Mascot, shouldered their bundles and left the Rookery, while New York Nat and Olive soon followed, Guard accompanying them, and seeming surprised at being allowed to go out into the open air, while the young Ferret chief said:

"This old Haunted House has been my home so long I leave it with real regret, sis."

CHAPTER XI.

GUARD AS A FERRET.

NEW YORK NAT folded their storm coats closely around them and faced the fury of the pelting rain without flinching.

It was quite a long walk to the cottage, and a rough one, for the streets not being improved there, the lamps were very seldom seen and the way a hard one.

But the cottage was reached and then Nat bade Olive good-night to be suddenly called back with the remark:

"Nat, I would not be a woman if I did not forget something, and I left my cash-bag on the table in the Rookery; but give me the key and I will get it to-morrow on my way to your new quarters."

"No, sis, I'll get it when I come up to supper to-morrow, for it will be safe I guess—good-night," and Nat walked away with Guard trotting close by his side.

"Somehow I have a feeling that we moved just in time, so I guess I'll go by and get the cash-bag now, for I can find my way without a lantern, and there is more money in it than we care to lose, should the Rookery be invaded."

"Come, Guard, we'll pay a farewell visit to our old home," and Nat walked more briskly along.

As he reached the iron gateway to the grounds Guard suddenly uttered a low growl.

"Ah! what's wrong, old dog?"

Over the wall Guard plunged and it took a stern command from Nat to bring him back.

Leaping over the wall then, Nat saw that Guard had struck a trail.

It led toward the mansion and was evidently a very fresh one, made since he and Olive had passed out, or the dog could not have followed it in the rain.

"What, so soon?"

"We were just in time," muttered Nat, and holding on to Guard's collar he allowed him to lead him on.

The dog went slowly and silently, and at last reaching the mansion went up the front steps to the porch, instead of by way of the cellar.

"Ah! this is it, is it?"

"None of the Ferrets come this way, and more, Guard would not have tracked them—no, strangers are here, and how many, and who they are remains to be seen, for I'll know who is shadowing us."

The last words were uttered in a determined way, and then Nat was surprised to see Guard suddenly poke his head through the door.

A lower panel had been cut out, and the space made was large enough to admit a man's form.

"Well, Guard, we will go in and investigate, for we know the old house in the dark as well as any strangers do."

"If it's a game of hide-and-seek, we can play it, I guess."

So said New York Nat, and taking the revolver he always carried in a hip pocket, he held it in his hand and slipped through the panel.

Then he called Guard through, and holding the dog by the collar he moved slowly and silently toward the stairs.

He listened attentively, but heard no sound on the floors above that were of a superstitious nature, though the wind howled without, and caused noises that would have been weird and uncanny to those who did not understand the cause.

Then he started up-stairs, but this Guard strenuously objected to.

The dog had his nose bent to the floor, and sniffed away in a manner that seemed to say that New York Nat might go by sight and sound, but he was guided by scent, and in that particular line could outscout the ferret.

"Down that way, are they, Guard?" whispered Nat, and a low whine was the answer, and the dog wished to push on.

"Well, old fellow, I suppose you know best, and can give me a pointer on trailing in the dark, so here goes, for I wish to find out who it is that is shadowing me, and if there are two or three of them, we stand as much chance in the dark as they do—keep quiet, will you, for I am going to take your advice."

Still holding hard to the dog's collar with one hand, and grasping his revolver with the other, New York Nat moved along, Guard being his guide through the darkness.

Coming to the head of the stairs leading to the basement, the dog began the descent to the hall below.

Across this hall, on the left, New York Nat knew that there was a door leading into the large cellar, which had a door leading outside, and to which he and the members of the clan had keys.

The cellar was where coal, wood and vegetables had been stored by the former inmates of the house, but was only a vast, empty basement now, while on the other side of the basement hall was the kitchen, servants' dining-room, and several sleeping-room; but in that part of the house Nat had seldom gone.

If there were men in the house, and the broken panel in the front door and Guard's behavior seemed proof that there were, then they could only be in in the large cellar-way or up-stairs.

The door opening into the cellar opened easily, having no lock or latch, and as Nat gently opened it only the slightest sound was made.

But the sound was heard and a voice said in a low tone which Nat distinctly heard:

"Hark!"

"He is coming, so be on your guard, and remember, no mercy!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE DEATH-STRUGGLE IN THE DARK.

THE words uttered by the man whom he could not see, to a confederate also wholly unseen in the midnight gloom, were distinctly heard by New York Nat.

He also placed the man by the sound as standing before one side of the cellar-door, and his pal must surely be upon the other side.

This was proof that he had been shadowed to the old Rookery and it was known that he entered and left by the cellar-door.

At another time Nat would have suspected that the men were legitimate detectives, or the police, and he would quietly have retraced his way, gotten the cash-bag and left the Rookery without a word, especially as he had already moved his traps away and given up his quarters there.

But the warning letter he had received, the two men whom Will Palmer had pointed out to him, and whom Parson had tracked from the gambling saloon to the slums, made him feel that he had not officials to deal with.

Then too the remark of one of them to "show no mercy" was most convincing that they were his shadowers.

That they came there to put him out of the way he felt that he had proof, and the thought raised the spirit of combativeness within him.

They sought him, were there to show no mercy, and he would fight it out let it be war to the bitter end.

He congratulated himself if there were two against him he was conscious of their presence, and they would be the surprised ones, not he.

Then the comradeship of Guard was most assuring.

That he knew the ground well was another thing in his favor.

Guard was trembling violently, and anxious to be allowed to attack, but he was too well trained to make a break without a word from his master and was as silent as a cat watching a mouse.

That his canine eyes could see the men was a cause for envy with Nat, and he smiled at the thought in spite of the danger.

Determined to take advantage of all he could to protect himself, Nat quietly shoved the door far back, knowing that it would remain open and he could fight from that vantage ground, protected by the wall on either side between the cellar and the hall.

Cautiously as he moved there was a slight sound which brought forth the whispered words:

"He's at the cellar door."

"You bet I wish he'd come," came a whisper from the other corner.

"He'll be in soon, and we'll flash our bull's-eyes upon him, and pull trigger the moment he closes the door behind him."

"May be it hain't him."

"Who is it, then?"

"Ghosts!"

"You're a durned fool."

"I don't like this place, for it's as dark as a dungeon and as spooky as a graveyard."

"Hush!"

"If I didn't have my bull's-eye to flash a light in a minute, and the hope of getting what the young fellow's got hid here, I wouldn't stay for big pay, you can gamble on it."

"Hush, I say!"

Just then Guard, who could control himself no longer gave a low whine.

"My God! what is that?" cried the man who had spoken of spooks.

"Only a ghost!" said Nat in sepulchral tone.

The effect of the words was startling all around, for the men were terrified and forgot to flash their bull's-eye lanterns, one of them uttering an oath, the other a yell, while Guard believing the ball had opened uttered a fierce discordant howl.

And all in total darkness save a tiny gleam from one of the lanterns which had been dropped upon the floor.

But one of the men was quick to regain his nerve and he shouted:

"He's played it on us!"

"Let him have it!"

A pistol flash illumined the cellar for a second and revealed the two men to Nat, while a bullet flattened against the wall near the door.

A second shot followed the first quickly, and it was the signal for New York Nat to fire and he did so, aiming at the flash.

Then shots rung quickly, half a dozen being fired in all, and above the reports rung out a savage yelp and unearthly yell as Guard rushed in upon one of the men.

The loud cry of Nat, calling the dog off, was at first unheeded, and then a silence came that was broken only by the storm raging outside.

"Guard!"

The dog answered by rubbing his nose against his master's hand.

"Where are they, Guard?"

A low whine, followed by a dismal howl was the answer.

"That would say that they are dead; but it was hot while it lasted."

"I'll go slow, for they are desperate fellows as cunning as redskins—no, you would not stay by me so readily if they were here—can they have escaped?"

"Ah! there is the gleam of a dark-lantern," and moving cautiously forward Nat took up the lantern, shaded the glass and retreated to the hallway.

Then he sprang the slides open and turned the glare into the cellar.

One glance was sufficient.

The men had not escaped; they were there on the cellar floor.

CHAPTER XIII.

NAT'S DOG PARD.

NAT stood a moment as though undecided.

Then he slowly approached the man lying nearest to him.

Reflecting the light in his face he gave a slight start and said:

"This is your work, Guard."

"But death came quickly—oh! it is the tall man whom I saw this morning, for these whiskers are false."

"Now to the other."

He crossed over to the other body and flashed the lantern upon him.

There was a bullet wound in one hand, a slight one in the neck and a third in the head.

The last had been the fatal shot that Nat had fired and he had aimed true each time.

The man was not as he expected, the companion seen with the other in the morning.

But he recognized him as one who had once been a city detective and who had been dismissed for robbing one whom he had been sent to protect.

Why he had never been tried was a mystery which only his superiors could explain and that they did not do.

Quickly Nat reached the two men, and he found money upon each of them, also a gold watch and chain and jewelry of some value.

There was not a slip of paper upon either, and leaving the bodies, after laying them out decently, their hands clasped upon their breasts, he went up-stairs, Guard still keeping close to their heels.

A piece of furniture in the hall was dragged up and placed against the broken panel, and lighting his way with the dark lantern he continued on up-stairs to the vacated lodge room of the Ferret Clan.

There he found the cash-bag Olive had left, and with a glance of farewell around him he hastily descended to the cellar.

In spite of the storm he had a fear that the shots might have reached the ears of some alert policeman, and if not, that there might be others of the band to which he was sure the two men belonged, who might be lying in wait near by.

But death alone held sway in the cellar and he went to the door and with the key, which he still had, let himself out.

The storm still raged, but unheeding it he walked rapidly through the shadowed grounds, having left the lantern extinguished in the cellar.

The faithful Guard trotted along at his heels, scaled the wall as he did and kept close to him until he reached an avenue where he could catch a car that would take him to the House of Ill-Omen.

He saw a car coming and considered himself fortunate, so hailing it, sprang on in front, Guard after him.

The driver started at sight of the enormous dog and began a protest:

"Howly Moses! is yer afther belavin' we'll carry a tiger like that same brute?"

"Here's his fare and mine, old man," and

Nat slipped a dollar into the driver's ready hand.

"I guess he kin ride, but I be not the conductor."

"I've got the match to that cart-wheel for him—call him forward."

"The b'aste rides thin; but say, young feller, the conducter gits the opportunity to knock-down fares when I does not, so split the cart-wheel and make it a half more to me."

Before Nat could reply the conductor came forward and Nat handed him the silver dollar with the remark:

"My puppy rides—keep the change."

The conductor said nothing but returned to the rear of the car while the driver remarked:

"A puppy, Howly Moses! but with his father's teeth."

"Be me sowl but he looks like a cross between a bear and a buffalo—Howly St-Patrick but his mouth is all rid with blood as I kin see by the car lamps."

"Don't mind that, for it was only a policeman he ate up."

"Only a polaceman was it?—I does make bould to hope he's not hungry now, young feller."

"Oh, no, he has had a good supper, for the policeman was a large and fat man."

"Only a polaceman! only a puppy," muttered the driver and with one eye upon Guard, the other upon his horses he drove rapidly on, anxious to get rid of his ugly customer.

"Is yer going far with your puppy, young feller?" he asked after driving some time in silence and at a clipping pace.

"I leave you at the next corner."

"Well, excuse me, but I'm not sorry, for your puppy hasn't tuk his eye off o' me for tin blissed blocks."

"Good-night," and Nat jumped off followed by Guard while the driver crossed himself with thankfulness at his escape, and to the end of his run kept repeating:

"Only a perlaceman! only a puppy!"

In the meanwhile Nat went on through the darkness and storm toward the new quarters.

He did not even meet another policeman to tempt Guard's appetite, and reaching the house he found all as dark and silent as the grave.

Opening the two doors with his pass-key he entered the hall.

There was the dimmest of dim lights there, but light enough to see the Clan of Ferrets seated and lying about, patiently awaiting his coming though getting a little alarmed at his delay.

"Boys, we moved not a minute too soon, for the Vampires, whoever they are, hold possession of the Rookery," he said as he entered the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE TRAGEDY MADE KNOWN.

THE words of New York Nat fell with startling effect upon the young Ferrets.

Every one was all attention at once, and giving some light, by opening wide Parson's lantern, he said:

"The Queen left her cash-book, and I returned for it."

"It was Guard here that saved me, for he took the scent at the wall, and I followed him up the front steps, where I found a panel gone from the door."

"That settled it, and I began to reconnoiter."

"Well, boys, they were in the cellar, one on each side of the door, for there were two, and I heard their words, and they told me that I was to be shown no mercy."

"At the proper minute I chipped in, and for just about five minutes there was a parrot and monkey time down in that cellar."

"Guard was in it, too, and with all four feet and a mouth full of teeth, in fact he silenced his man while I did mine; but I had the advantage of a surprise, and also being mistaken for a ghost, while what time they had for thinking, I guess they thought Guard was the devil.

"I found their dark-lanterns, and one of them was the tall man I saw this morning, the other was ex-Detective Miles, who went to the bad, you remember.

"I found nothing on them to follow them up by, but their money—counterfeit—and jewelry—stolen—I left on them, to let the chief find it when I report it through our ally."

"Then you will report it, Captain Nat?"

"Oh, yes, Parson, as they cannot discover who killed them, and must let the coroner's jury guess at it; besides, we could not leave them there to await discovery, for who goes to the Rookery?"

"Now the dive of one of them Parson discovered for me, and there are more of a kind there, so our duty is to all hunt for some clue of the Desperado Vampires, or Detectives, for they are up to games they wish to get us out of the way to accomplish, for they fear us.

"Now, boys, we must not be downed, and you know just what to do.

"The papers to-morrow afternoon will be full of it, and you keep on the alert for every word you can pick up.

"Now let us get these things in shape, and then you can get for your lodging-places, for it would never do to see so many filing out of here early the first morning the house is occupied, or I would ask you to stay."

With this the men carried the traps brought from the Rookery to the places designated by Nat, he having lighted several candles, for the gas was not turned on.

By one o'clock he was fairly well settled and the Ferrets began to drop out two and three together, Nat promising to have their keys for them on the morrow.

As the house stood on the ground space of several lots, and was on a corner, it was separated from other residences in the block, and had the Park in front of it, so that it was the very place for the retreat of the Ferrets, and Nat congratulated himself again and again upon having secured it.

As soon as the Ferrets were gone he threw himself down to rest, and in spite of another tragedy having come into his life he was soon fast asleep.

But he awoke early, fed Guard, left him in charge and went out to the nearest car line and started down-town.

It was still raining, but little he cared for that and he sprung off the car near the Barrett House and went in and got his breakfast.

He had made his toilet most carefully, putting on a wig of yellow hair, rather long, large gold-rimmed spectacles, a black frock coat buttoned close up to the chin, gray pants and a high hat.

He certainly knew how to "make up" most cleverly for he would have been mistaken anywhere for a German student, or professor, as he looked fully thirty.

In addressing the waiter he spoke in good English, but with a strong accent, and carried out his disguise by ordering German dishes.

Then he hastened away to see Sherman Canfield, whom he found just finishing breakfast, with Will Palmer as his guest.

They soon joined him in the library and Will Palmer said in his frank way:

"Well, you're a dandy, Chandler—you even have the flavor of beer and pretzels about you."

"You mistake me, sir, for some one else—I am Professor Herman Spinola," replied Nat seriously, but added, as both laughed at him.

"But joking aside, I am in trouble, Mr. Canfield."

"What is it, my dear boy?" said Canfield in a serious tone.

"I will tell you, sir, and as Mr. Palmer is now one of us, he can hear too.

"You will have to go to see the chief at once, Mr. Canfield, for there is a case for a coroner up at the Rookery, in fact two of them, one being, Mr. Palmer, the tall man you warned me against yesterday."

And Nat told the story of his change of quarters and of the midnight tragedy in the Haunted House.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CHIEF AND HIS ALLY.

THE chief of the Secret service had given orders that Mr. Sherman Canfield was always to be promptly admitted to his private quarters whenever he should call.

He had reason to know that Canfield was generally the bearer of important information to him, as the ally of the detective whom the chief always spoke of as his "Unknown."

The chief was a handsome man, every inch a soldier in appearance, but with a kindly nature in spite of his stern face and severe profession.

He was busy when Sherman Canfield called, half an hour after the story of Nat had been told, and greeted his visitor pleasantly, motioning him to a seat.

The stern chief had taken a great fancy to the young Nebraskan, who reciprocated the feeling.

"More trouble and trouble, sorrow and sorrow, misery, suffering and crime, Canfield, every day, for see my reports are full of it.

"It is enough to make a man's heart callous to everything; but what can I do for you?" and the chief dropped his reports and turned to Sherman Canfield, who replied:

"The shoe is on the other foot, chief, for I have something to do for you."

"Ah! my Unknown has been doing more good work, eh, and you are here to report?"

"If by getting two criminals ready for the undertaker is good work, he has been doing that."

"Now that is about the best way to get rid of them.

"But what is it?"

"You know the old-time mansion far up-town, known as the Haunted House and adjoining a graveyard?"

"Yes, the Lockwood estate, afterwards owned by the old miser known as Miser Max and who was killed there by robbers, who in turn were brought down by my mysterious Unknown some two years ago.

"I know the place and it has a weird and unenviable name."

"It has added to its reputation as a spooky place, sir, for last night two men went there to lie in wait for one they had reason to know was to be there, and to kill him.

"The Unknown turned the tables on them, and after a hot fight, aided by his dog, he killed the two crooks."

"They were known to be crooks, eh?"

"One you will recognize as as your ex-Ferret Miles—"

"Ah! then he has been killed eh?"

"I expected it, and he has merely cheated the gallows, for I had several charges against him of murder, for he went thoroughly to the bad.

"My men reported that he had left town."

"He has now, sir," was Sherman Canfield's significant reply.

"There is a price due on his head; but who was the other?"

"A man the Unknown says belongs to a secret band here which I wish to ask you about."

"All right."

"The Unknown seems to think there is a band of crooks here divided into two cliques.

"One of these are shadowers of the police and your detectives, to allow the other band to work at their trade of robbery, murder or whatever comes their way."

"A remarkable idea certainly, and one never advanced to me before.

"Tell me more of this wonderful find of your friend, my Unknown," and the chief showed deepest interest in what he had heard.

"No more is yet known, sir; but my friend is convinced that there is such a band, and confidentially I will tell you that they are known as the Desperado Detectives, and the Vampires."

"Remarkable!"

"But, continue, Mr. Canfield."

"I said I would tell you the name in confidence, for I do not care to have you put your men to hunt down a band under a name, which if known, might give warning of danger, and cause them to scatter."

"I shall so regard it.

"But my Unknown is working up the case?"

"Yes, sir."

"I shall leave all to him."

"It seems that this band dread him, having in some way found out about him, and they addressed him a letter of warning to leave the city or suffer a fearful death."

"And he?"

"Does not scare in the least; but is running down the Vampires, and he has proof that the men he killed last night belong to the band.

"You will find upon their bodies stolen jewelry, and a lot of counterfeit money, and he has proof that one of them, with another comrade, yesterday passed counterfeit money at the St. James Cafe, upon the dealer at C—'s gambling saloon, and upon two or more hack-drivers.

"These two dead men you will find in the old Rookery, and here is the key to admit you to the cellar door, while you will have to state what you please regarding the killing of the two men."

"I will simply say it was done by my men under orders, who were there to capture the crooks, and were fired upon.

"Let my Unknown continue his good work and call upon me, through you, for all the aid I can render."

"Thank you, chief; but now I would like to ask you if you know of any one by the name of Leonard Long in the city?"

"Leonard Long—I have heard the name—is it in the Directory?"

"No, sir."

The chief touched a bell, and said to the clerk who answered:

"Look back twenty years over the Directories for the name of Leonard Long."

The clerk soon after brought in a slip of paper, upon which was written:

"Leonard Long—actor.

"NOTE.—Disowned by his father for some mysterious reason never known. Left the city, and not since heard of. Present whereabouts unknown. Directory of 18—."

"I recall the name and circumstance now, Canfield—come in when you can—good-morning," and the chief turned to give orders about the dead men at the Rookery, while Sherman Canfield returned to his home, where Nat awaited with Will Palmer.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MYSTERY OF THE HOUSE OF ILL OMEN.

THE "mutual friend," or ally between the chief of the Secret Service and the "Unknown Ferret," returned to his home and reported just what had occurred.

"I thank you, Mr. Canfield, and now I can devote myself to Mr. Palmer's work and the finding out of the Vampires.

"We at least know that one Leonard Long did live in New York, some half a

dozen years ago, was the son of a rich father who lived at—by the stars of night, the number is the same as my new quarters the House of Ill Omen," cried Nat suddenly as he saw the address.

"A most remarkable coincidence," said Sherman Canfield.

"It is indeed."

"To think that the man I seek should have lived in your quarters; but what is the story of this House of Ill Omen?" Will Palmer asked.

"A rich man built it and lived there with his son and servants."

"The son left home, and while absent the father was either murdered or took his own life, one of the servants, a young girl, also dying mysteriously about the same time."

"Now it transpires that Mr. Long disinherited his son, his property being left to charity and the present owner of the place, a lady whose daughter also met a mysterious death in the place, either being murdered or taking her own life."

"Since then the house has not been occupied and the whereabouts of the son, whose being disinherited is a mystery, no one knows."

"I wonder if it can be my man, professor?" asked Will Palmer.

"I will find out, for it has not been so long ago but that I can find people who knew young Leonard Long, and perhaps I can run across a photograph of him, or get such a description that you will know, Mr. Palmer, whether it be the man you seek or not."

"All is in your hands, professor, and let me say that you have the cleverest way of getting at the bottom facts of a case that I ever knew."

"Thanks."

"Now I must be off, for I am to get my sign up as a professor of music, and more I have lots to do, for Olive, my sister, Mr. Palmer, and our Mascot, is to meet me at the House of Ill Omen and set me in order."

Nat then took his leave, Sherman Canfield promising that he and Will Palmer would drop in and see the "professor" after he got settled.

"Yes, I wish to take lessons from you, professor, if not in music in the craft of Secret Service work, for I am very sure I could not find a cleverer teacher," called out Palmer, as Nat left the room.

When New York Nat returned to his quarters he had with him the sign which he had ordered the day before and which he at once put up.

Soon after Olive arrived, rigged out like a girl come for a day's house-cleaning, and Nat ushered her in with considerable pride at having to show her over his new home.

"Here is a wagon at the door with the things I ordered, so we'll get them in, and in place, and when I have put up my sign, Olive, I have much to tell you."

The purchases were soon put in place, and Olive devoted herself to cleaning up Nat's living rooms, and the large parlor on the second floor where the piano stood, and which though called the "music room" was to be used as the assembly quarters of the Clan.

A second and third sleeping-room were also prepared, in case of need, the kitchen put in order, should Nat care to cook his own meals at any time, and Guard was given the run of the house from cellar to garret, but not of the yard—he had had his outing the night before, and policemen were scarce as food in that part of the city, while Nat did not know just what the ferocious beast might do if out from under his eye.

Nat put the sign up in front, while Olive was cleaning house, and was amused to see a small crowd watching him with open-mouthed amazement, and setting him down as a distilled fool for moving into a house with such a record as that one had.

"They should put themselves upon the record of my late quarters," he said, grimly, as the people eyed him.

Presently one old man made bold to address him, one of those curious old men who always are to be found moving around every community.

"What might be your name, sir?" he asked.

"It might be Herman Spinola, sir," and Nat pointed proudly to the sign, which he had just tacked up.

"The agent has deceived you in renting this house, for no one can live here."

"If I don't live here, I will die here," was Nat's reply.

"It has an awful name."

"I makes it haf a goot name den."

"Well, if you don't take advice all right."

"So I say—good-morning," and Nat went into the house and left the crowd to gape on and listen to the old oracle state that the "German fool" would not live there a week.

Seeking Olive Nat told her the story of his adventures, and the happenings since he bade her good-by the night before at her home.

CHAPTER XVII.

TELLTALE "SIGNS."

It was after nightfall when Nat and Olive left the house together, the latter to return to her home after having supper with her brother.

The house had been put in first-class condition, as far as the rooms to be occupied were concerned, the gas meter man had been there and turned on the gas, and Nat left a burner lighted in the hall and Guard on duty to await his return.

Having seen Olive home he returned to his quarters, making a few purchases on his way for Guard, and stopping to get the keys he had had made, and which he explained to the locksmith were for his pupils to enable them to go to the rooms to practice when he was not there.

He had just gotten back when Sherman Canfield and Will Palmer called, the latter not recognizable without a searching look, as he had changed his style of dress, carried a gold-headed cane, wore a high beaver hat, eye-glasses and had had his hair cut short.

"Leonard Long will never know me now, professor, for I refrained from looking into a mirror until the change was complete, and positively I did not know myself."

"Then I sprung myself suddenly upon my old pard Sherman here and he did not know me, so, if Long is in the city he will never recognize in me the William B. Palmer, Texan, that he knew."

"No, and it is better so, for if he is here, and ran across you, he would suspect something surely, if he is the guilty man you think."

"Looking as you now do you can spend your leisure time going around among the hotels, the gambling saloons, haunting the Rialto, where the actors loaf, and trying to get your eye upon your man."

"And remember, Mr. Palmer, you must look for him in disguise as well, for if he is under suspicion here he will make some change in his make-up in coming back; perhaps he may change his name."

"I will remember this and look for any man that in anyway resembles him, no matter what his dress, appearance or name," answered Will Palmer.

"I am glad you came up to-night, for I have something to show you—see this photograph of one of my disguises and say if you would ever know it as me," and Nat handed a photograph to Will Palmer, who, with one glance at it cried:

"Ah! you found a photograph of him then?"

"Of him? why I told you it was one of myself in disguise."

"Nothing of the kind, for I am not a fool if I am a Texan Tenderfoot."

"Who do you take it to be?"

"I know it to be Leonard Long, though this is some years younger than he was as I knew him."

"I am glad to know who it is a photograph of, for I found it to-day, or rather my sister Olive did, lying flat on the top shelf of the closet in the room of the young servant girl who died here, it is said in a mysterious manner."

"And you see that there is written on the back:

"TO LAURA—MY GIRL—"

"FROM LEN—HER BOY."

"Dec. 28th 18—"

"By the Lone Star of Texas, but you could trail a jack rabbit over a prairie, professor."

"This is Leonard Long, and his writing as well, for I have a letter in my pocket that he wrote Myrtle Maximo, and I brought it on for proof—see there."

"Yes, the writing is the same, and he signs his name in it, as on the photograph, Len."

"But I have something else to show you both—come with me, please," and Nat led the way up-stairs.

He entered the room where the young lady had died, also murdered, or a suicide, and pointed to the stain on the floor.

"This is the room where the daughter of the lady who was left this house by Mr. Long, senior, was murdered."

"I say murdered, for the mother was away at the time, and the house was robbed of some petty things on that same night, but whether Miss Malvin—her name was Madge Malvin and she was eighteen—I say whether her jewels were taken her mother never told."

"Now I got the whole history of this house from the agent, and you will see, as I show you, that Mr. Long, the servant girl Laura Landis, for such was her name, and Miss Madge Malvin all died or were murdered in bed."

"A strange thing about it was that each one died from a knife thrust in the heart."

"Now I have decided that one hand drove the knife each time; in fact, the three were murdered by the same person, for some cause unknown to us—See here!"

"Go it, Nat, you are as sure on the scent as a hound, and though you have not been twenty-four hours in this house you have begun to unravel its mysteries."

"It's not so hard to do, Mr. Canfield, with the tell-tale signs before me as I have here. Do you see this writing on this mirror with a diamond?"

"Yes," said both men eagerly.

"This room has never been cleaned up since the day of Miss Malvin's death; but Olive put it in order to-day."

"The blood-stain still remains upon the floor, for it was summer time and there were rugs instead of a carpet, and right on the center of this mirror I noticed a fancy picture pasted."

"It just covered this writing, and more, there were blood-stains upon the little picture, finger-marks in fact, showing that it was pasted there, apparently as an ornament, but in reality to hide what was written on the glass, and more, it was done the night of Miss Malvin's murder and by her murderer."

"Read it, and here is the picture I soaked off."

And the Texan tenderfoot read aloud:

"My Hero—My Idol—L. L."

"His creed shall be my creed."

"Where he goes I will follow if to death."

"M. M."

"N. Y., June 10th, 18—"

And the three stood gazing at each other at the story the diamond-cut lines on the mirror told.

CHAPTER XVIII.

NAT READS THE SIGNS.

"PROFESSOR, I am speechless with amazement at your find.

"You were born a detective, if ever one was born with a talent.

"I put my hat on and take it off to you, for the Texas Tenderfoot sees just the trail you are following," said Will Palmer with enthusiasm and sincere admiration for the Boy Ferret.

"I think I see your lead, too, Nat," Sherman Canfield remarked.

"Please, each give your ideas, as they help me.

"What do you think, Mr. Palmer?"

"That this man Long is a lady-killer—the girl Laura got mashed on him, and the other, whose mother was in some way related to Long, senior, also found him her beau ideal, her hero, and that both took her life when she discovered he was false to her."

"And you, Mr. Canfield?"

"Well, I was going to see in their death something even more tragic, Nat."

"Well, sir?"

"I was going to say that one killed her rival and then took her own life."

Nat smiled and said:

"No, for the girl Laura died December 28th, Mr. Long on January 2d, a few days later, and Miss Malvin in June of the same year."

"True, I had not thought of the dates, Nat."

"You bet the professor had—let us hear his theory, and my new hat on it that he hits dead center," Will Palmer remarked.

"My idea is that both girls loved Long, and his flirtation with the servant cost her her life.

"That he compromised himself with her his photograph shows, and the agent told me she was a young lady by birth and education, and accepted the place as a housekeeper on account of her being poor.

"Miss Malvin was a society girl, I get from the same authority, like the servant girl, beautiful in face and form.

"The flirtation with Laura was doubtless discovered by Mr. Long, senior, and was the cause of Long, junior, leaving his father's home.

"The death of the girl followed several months after, and then came the old man's taking off.

"In June following Miss Malvin died, all within six months.

"Now as the photograph, and the writing here on the mirror prove that the man was carrying on a love affair with both girls at the same time, he doubtless wished to get one out of the way.

"He knew the house well, and the habits of the occupants, he had without doubt his night-key that allowed him to enter.

"He did so, sought the room of Laura, a scene followed, threatened exposure, and he silenced her.

"Knowing that he was driven from his home, and perhaps believing his father had not made a new will against him, he came by night, again entered with his pass-key, saw his father and—well, the old man died from a knife-thrust, as Laura had done.

"But the will had been changed, others had been given the fortune that should have been his, he reasoned, but the girl loved him, her mother would not allow her to marry him.

"If she became his wife, he could get half at least of the property, and so, by aid of his pass-key, he came by night, in her mother's absence, to see her.

"He had written her of his coming, and there had been a bitter quarrel between them, as this letter shows—I found it behind the fire-board, partially burned, as you see, as it had been thrown there.

"It is dated the day before Miss Malvin's

death, and was written in New York City—I'll read it aloud," and unfolding a piece of crumpled paper, the edges of which were burned, Nat read:

"I can explain all, everything to you, if I see you—I can not, dare not write.

"That girl was a blackmailer, but my father believed her.

"I will tell the whole truth, and you must, you shall believe me, or—"

"You see these words are burned," said Nat, "but then follows:

"— am coming,

"Your d—

"—EN.

"N. Y., June, 18—."

"Now Leonard Long came.

"What took place he alone can tell, for she is dead, and he killed her."

"My God! can he be so evil a man, Nat?"

"Yes, Mr. Canfield, for is there not proof that when he was supposed to be in Europe, as the agent says, he was really in New York?"

"Is there not proof that he gave his photograph to Laura Landis, as her lover?"

"This writing on the glass proves that Madge Malvin loved him, and his letter shows that she knew he was in New York, and had accused him of being false to her.

"This appears to be a hard character for only one man to bear, but Mr. Palmer comes on with a story of a young girl who loved a fascinating man by the name of Leonard Long.

"Mr. Palmer says that he had some money, and professed to be rich, and also that Mr. Maximo was murdered, his wife seriously wounded the night Leonard Long eloped with Myrtle Maximo.

"He tells us of crimes committed there, of men being robbed, and just those deeds chime in with the death of the three people in this house, and I say it is Leonard Long's work, that he has a mania for life-taking and gold-getting, and that he considers all men and women his prey."

"Professor Herman Spinola, you have read the signs like an open book, or I am not a Texas Tenderfoot," said Will Palmer, impressively.

CHAPTER XIX.

UNSEEN WITNESSES.

NAT'S fine face showed no sign of triumph at his supposed truthful reading of the "signs" of Leonard Long's guilt.

He was not one to "cross a bridge before he got to it," and never hurried until there was cause for it.

Both Sherman Canfield and Will Palmer were happy over the "find," and earnestly discussed it; but Nat asked quietly:

"Have you any idea, Mr. Palmer, of the nature of the robbery at the Maximo ranch?"

"That was very hard to ascertain, as the Don was dead and Mrs. Maximo seriously wounded, while she would not speak of the robbery at all."

"Any jewels, gold, and other things?"

"Yes, an old servant said that she knew that a splendid necklace of diamonds, and another of rubies were gone, with rings of great value, and other jewelry, as well as quite a sum in gold."

"American gold?"

"No, Mexican."

"And the jewelry, was it of American manufacture?"

"No, of Mexican."

"You have seen it?"

"Yes, I have seen both Mrs. Maximo and Miss Myrtle wear the jewels."

"Can you describe them?"

"As I remember them, yes," and Will Palmer did so, Nat taking notes.

"Now let me ask if the Maximos were

willing for the marriage of their daughter to Leonard Long?"

"Mrs. Maximo, yes, but the Don swore that she should marry a young Mexican Army officer who was very rich and a cousin of his.

"Miss Myrtle seemed to like him too, until Leonard Long crossed her path."

"Then the Don would not have allowed her to marry Long?"

"No, and I did hear that he had written the young officer to come there, as he was getting fearful of Long's influence over his daughter."

"The more I hear of Leonard Long of Texas, the more I feel that he and the Leonard Long of New York are one and the same without the photographic proof even."

"Yes, yet the one in Texas, you know, claimed to be from Chicago."

"True, but he was from New York all the same," said Nat with confidence.

"And do you believe he is in New York now?"

"Yes, Mr. Palmer."

"May I ask your reasons for thinking so, professor, for you know mine?"

"Certainly."

"If a man has begun his criminal career in New York he is sure to come back here, no matter where he may drift.

"Especially if he is hunted will he come here to hide, for where there are the most people it is easy to conceal one's self.

"Then too if he is a vampire, living on other people, this is the place he will come, and I am sure we will find Leonard Long here, and the one he ran off with also."

"Is it not strange that she, a young, pure, noble girl should cling to him after knowing what he is?"

"But does she?"

"Is he not hiding from her his real character, until he tires of her, and seeks some one else whom he can get money through or rob?"

"Then you expect to find him?"

"You have my pledge that I will, and I am more confident now than ever," was Nat's reply, and a warning growl from Guard told him some one was at the door.

"It is some of the Clan, for they are to come after their key and to make a report, for I started them upon the track of the Vampire."

"Then too I expect Parson will bring me some information," and leaving the two friends in his room, Nat left the door ajar and went into the room arranged for the meeting of the band.

The two kept quiet, not wishing to let their presence be known, as Nat was going to give them a look at his Ferrets, for even Sherman Canfield knew but Olive and a couple of the boys.

Parson was the first to arrive, and Guard escorted him up-stairs as though to discover if it was all right in that house as in the Rookery.

Seeing that it was, the dog returned to the dock to await other arrivals and acquaint Nat with their coming with a growl.

Had a stranger happened in Guard would have welcomed him very differently, but he knew all of the members of the band, though he obeyed only Nat and Olive.

"You were right, Cap'n Nat, for the men did pay the hackmen in counterfeit money, and it was the queer that they shoved at the St. James and also at C—'s gambling saloon," said Parson.

"I knew it, but wished to have you find out the real truth.

"Did you make any discovery about their dive?"

"None; but I saw the afternoon papers and the killing of those two men in the Rookery last night has created quite an excitement."

"I merely had time to glance at the papers; but suppose Keno will have some-

thing to report of how the news was received at Police Headquarters."

"Yes, he should," and as Palmer spoke the others began to drop in singly and in pairs.

Guard met each one at the door and escorted them up, returning to his post when they had been greeted by his master.

The boys took their places in the seats as they entered, and when all were present Nat rapped for order and called for reports.

They had little more to tell than that they had laid their plans that day for future work, but Keno, who was under clerk at Police Headquarters, stated that the force was considerably worked up over the killing of the two crooks in the Rookery, and which the chief had not explained.

What men on the force had killed them they could not discover, but one of the men being recognized as the ex-detective Miles, the other was also known as one of the most desperate and daring criminals in the city who had long eluded capture, for he was an escaped convict, sentenced for murder.

Telling the boys to devote their whole time to unearthing the Vampires, Nat dismissed them, and when all had departed returned to join Canfield and Palmer who had been interested and silent witnesses of the meeting of the Ferrets.

CHAPTER XX.

NAT'S PLOT.

WHEN again with Sherman Canfield and Will Palmer, New York Nat said:

"Now let me give you my plan of action."

"Parson, the first one to arrive to-night, dogged those two men you put me on to, Mr. Palmer, to a large flat house, up-town."

"They drove there in a carriage, and went up to see certain friends living there, for Parson found this out through the janitor."

"From there they went to the slums of the city, and to one of the most desperate dives there, if it is the place I think it is."

"Now who could those two men be visiting in that fashionable flat house?"

"I give it up, Nat, but some one who cannot know who they were."

"So I should say," added Will Palmer to Sherman Canfield's remark.

"They were visiting a rich young swell, the janitor told Parson, and I would like to ask you, Mr. Palmer, if you ever heard of the name of Benedict Mildmay?"

"Benedict Mildmay?"

"Yes, I have heard the name somewhere, and under some circumstances, but for the life of me, I cannot recall now."

"You are sure?"

"Yes, for it is a name once heard not readily forgotten."

"That is why I ask you if you are sure."

"I am certain."

"Was it in Texas?"

"I think not."

"Since you came to New York?"

"No, or I should recall it at once."

"Mr. Sherman, did you ever hear the name?"

"I think not."

"You cannot recall where you heard it, Mr. Palmer?"

"I cannot."

"Was it from Leonard Long?"

"No, I am sure not—it was since I saw him—oh! I have it, I saw it in a paper while on my way North."

"In a paper?"

"Yes, in a New York paper."

"You remember the circumstances?"

"I had read the news, and was glancing over the paper when my eyes fell upon an item headed:

"'CHANGING A NAME FOR A FORTUNE.'

"I read the article, and it stated that a rich man by the name of Benedict Mildmay,

a bachelor, having no near kindred in this country, but himself an American by adoption, but an Englishman by birth, had been saved from death by a young man once, and had lately left him his fortune, on condition that he should change his name to his own, that of Benedict Mildmay."

"It went on to state that the young man had gained through his life-saving deed, and the change of name, a very large fortune, which he intended to enjoy by becoming a resident of New York City."

"But what has all this to do with our man, professor?"

"Have you forgotten that I told you Parson said the two men visited a man in the fashionable flat by the name of Benedict Mildmay?"

"That is so; but what do you make out of that?"

"I wish to find out what Mr. Mildmay was before he got his fortune, that two such men can visit him, and also if he knew who and what they are."

"If he does he may be able to let me into a secret, and through it I may unearth the Vampires."

"Those who warned you out of the city?"

"Yes, sir, for I am working up your case and the Vampires' together."

"I see," said Will Palmer, thoughtfully, and Nat continued:

"I will go and call on Mr. Mildmay tomorrow, and the next day I will go to the dive down in the slums, which Parson saw the two men enter, and see what I can find out there."

"Don't risk too much, Nat, as I am afraid you will do," said Sherman Canfield, earnestly.

"I'll risk no more than I must, sir, and I'll go well disguised, I assure you; but I am convinced that the men have their den there, and just who and what these Crook Detectives are I am determined to know."

After some further conversation Sherman Canfield and Will Palmer took their leave, and Nat was left alone with his dumb comrade, Guard.

The young Ferret paced to and fro in the room for nearly an hour, his thoughts busy with his plans, and at last he muttered:

"I do not wonder that Mr. Palmer cannot see any connection between his man Long and the band of Desperado Vampires, for I do not myself see the connecting link; but somehow the two are constantly mixing up together in my mind, and I will feel that one has something to do with the other."

"To-morrow I will go first and see this Benedict Mildmay, and I'll go in a disguise that will strike him."

"But I'm tired and will now to bed."

Nat slept as soundly in the House of I'll Omen, as though it had never been said to be peopled with ghosts, and he awoke the next morning refreshed and ready for the work he had set out to accomplish.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FAIR INQUISITOR.

"PARDON me, but is Mr. Benedict Mildmay a resident in this house?"

The janitor of the Sky Parlor Flats turned in a lazy way, like a man who felt his importance, and when his eyes rested upon the one who asked the question his whole manner changed, for no man can look into the face of a very pretty woman and not be polite, no matter how rude he may be to ugly ones.

"I beg pardon, miss, but Mr. Mildmay does live here."

"I would like to go up to his flat and see him?"

"Certainly, miss, but Mr. Mildmay is out of town since yesterday, but his wife is here."

"His wife?" and the manner in which the words were spoken caused the janitor to fear

he had made a mistake and he added quickly:

"Mrs. Mildmay, miss."

"Did you not know that he was married?"

"Has he been here long?"

"No, miss, only a short while."

"I am not sure that it is the Mr. Mildmay I mean, and I came to find out."

"I know your time is most valuable, but as you seem so polite and kind, I am going to worry you awhile, only remember, if it should not be my friend, you must not speak of my coming here," and the gloved hand dropped into the palm of the janitor a ten dollar bill.

The janitor flushed with surprise and pleasure, and said:

"I am at your service, miss, though I am always busy, you know, as mine is a most important position here."

"But walk into my little office and let me know what I can do for you."

The fair visitor entered the little office, took a seat and said:

"I used to know a Mr. Benedict Mildmay, very well, I may say."

"He was not married, however, then."

"Is this one rich?"

"He would have to be, miss, to live here, for he has one of the front, corner flats, yes, and he has a small one in the rear, too."

"Then he has a large family?"

"Oh, no, miss, only a young wife; but he has some bachelor friends of a sporty kind whom I guess madam does not like and he shows them to the little flat."

"But receives all of his fashionable friends and wife's company in his fine large flat?"

"Bless you, miss, she receives no company, nor does he, except the sports I spoke of."

"Yet they are rich you say?"

"Oh, yes; but they have not got any friends in the city, I guess, being strangers."

"How long have they been here?"

"They took the flat furnished, from an advertisement in the paper, and the little flat of five rooms Mr. Mildmay secured the next day, to hold for a friend, he said; but it was not furnished, and he only moved in some chairs, a table and a few other things."

"What kind of looking man is he?"

"A tall, handsome fellow, a perfect heart-breaker the ladies say who have seen him."

"And he is out of town?"

"Yes, miss, said he was going to Boston for a day or two."

"Is Mrs. Mildmay handsome?"

"She's perfectly grand, miss, but looks like she was a foreigner, though she speaks English perfectly."

"I suppose she goes out a great deal?"

"She has ridden on horseback quite often, miss, and she told me she was raised on horseback."

"I believe after all I will see her, for I may find out from her what I would like to know."

The elevator boy was called, a card given him to take to Mrs. Mildmay, and the visitor awaited his return.

"Mrs. Mildmay says you are to come up, miss," said the boy.

Entering the elevator, the visitor was taken to the seventh floor and a touch on a bell caused a door to be opened by a young and very beautiful girl of slender, graceful form.

"Pardon me for admitting you, but we keep no servants save those furnished by the house, and none came at my ring."

"Be seated, Miss Sherman, and let me know how I can serve you."

She led the way into a richly furnished parlor and received her visitor with the perfect ease of one reared in the best of society.

Miss Sherman gazed at the handsome young bride with undisguised admiration at her beauty, and said:

"I am sorry to disturb you, Mrs. Mild-

may, but I called to see your husband, but was told that he had gone to Boston."

"Yes, but only for several days."

"Will I not do as well?"

"Perhaps so, and even better, as you may tell me what his modesty would not allow him to do."

"I am on the Press, Mrs. Mildmay, and there was an interesting article in a New York paper of a fortune left him by one who gave it on condition that he would take the name of the gentleman with the estate."

"Yes, my husband showed me the article—I have it here."

"My purpose is to find out something of one favored with a fortune with a name, to make a readable article that he would feel pleased with, so I will be glad of any information you can give me about him, and you can show it to him as a surprise when it appears."

"I shall be delighted," said the young wife, glad to please her husband, and she added:

"What is it you would know about him, Miss Sherman?"

"He is a New Yorker, I believe?"

"No, he is a comparative stranger here, for he came from Chicago."

"He saved the life of the gentleman who left him his fortune and name?"

"Yes, he saved him from being murdered on the highway by footpads, one of whom he killed."

"Do you mind telling me his other name?"

"He has dropped it completely, never refers to it in fact, according to the terms of the will, but I can see no harm in letting those who knew him under his real name, know of his good fortune through the papers, so I will tell you that it was Leonard Long."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE TEXAN TENDERFOOT'S VISITOR.

SHERMAN CANFIELD and Will Palmer had just come in from a drive in the Park.

They had had breakfast at eight, read all the papers had to say about the affair at the Rookery, with an attack on the head of the Secret Service for holding something back about the killing, for newspapers often think and assert that the public should be let into all secrets, and then the two friends had gone for a drive.

Lunch was waiting for them and they were just lighting their cigars when the butler came to say that there was a lady in the parlor to see Mr. Palmer.

"Ah, Will, so soon—and in New York but two or three days?" jokingly said Sherman Canfield.

"I don't know her, and you should, for she bears your name."

"I guess it is a mistake of the butler," and Will Palmer handed over a card.

"Miss Sherman," said Sherman Canfield thoughtfully.

"She is no friend of mine I'll be sworn."

"As the butler said she asked for you, go in, Will."

So Will Palmer, the Texan Tenderfoot, entered the parlor.

A tall, slenderly formed lady, closely veiled and elegantly dressed, arose from a chair to greet him.

"Mr. Palmer, may I ask?"

"Yes, madam—I beg pardon, for your card read Miss Sherman," and the young man was slightly confused, for the lady before him had a very striking face.

"Miss Sherman it is, sir."

"May I ask if you are Mr. William B. Palmer of Montezuma Ranch, Texas?"

"I am, miss."

"Are you acquainted with a lady known as Miss Myrtle Maximo?"

"Yes, what of her?" quickly asked the Texan.

"First I would like to ask you a few other questions—"

"Certainly."

"In the presence of a witness."

"If you wish."

"I will call my friend and host, Mr. Sherman Canfield—he is in the library."

"Do so, please."

Will Palmer left the parlor and going into the library said:

"Come, Sherman, throw away that cigar, for there's a mighty pretty woman in the parlor and she's just dying of curiosity to see you."

"Let her die—I prefer to smoke."

"No, joking aside, I don't know her, never saw her, and she opened on me like a lawyer cross-examining a witness, and asked me if I was from Montezuma Ranch, Texas."

"Then she asked if I knew Miss Myrtle Maximo and that took my breath away."

"Her next was that she wished to question me before a witness, and I sailed in for you."

"She's a dandy."

"I'll go and investigate," and the cigar was thrown away and Sherman Canfield accompanied Will Palmer into the parlor.

Introduced to her, Canfield bowed in his quiet way, and the visitor said:

"I learned of Mr. Palmer's being in the city, Mr. Canfield, how it matters not, and I have some questions to ask him, but desire a witness and he called you."

"If satisfied, Miss Sherman, with me as a witness I shall be glad to serve."

"Thank you."

"Now, Mr. Palmer, you said that you know Miss Myrtle Maximo of Texas?"

"Yes, I knew her well."

"You say you knew her; do you not know her now?"

"Not as Miss Maximo, for she was married about a month ago."

"That is just it."

"Do you know that she was married?"

"I know the young lady, and as she left her home with a—a gentleman, I feel pretty sure that she became his wife."

"Do you know the man well?"

"No, I knew him only by what he said of himself."

"Do you know where Miss Myrtle Long is now?"

"If she is married she is Mrs. Leonard Long."

"You are mistaken."

"What do you mean?"

"I know her."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where she is?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In New York."

"In this city?"

"She is."

"As Myrtle Maximo or Mrs. Leonard Long?"

"Neither."

"Is she not married then?"

"I presume that she is."

"I do not understand."

"Long is not her name."

"What is it then?"

"She is Mrs. Benedict Mildmay."

"Benedict Mildmay?"

"Yes."

"Sherman, that is the name our friend asked me if I had ever heard."

"Yes, Will."

"What had you heard of the name, Mr. Palmer?"

"That it was the name of some old crook who left his fortune to a young man who would take his name."

"Do you know the real name of the young man who took the name of Benedict Mildmay?"

"I do not."

"I can tell you."

"It really is a matter of no interest to me."

"Not if it was Leonard Long, Mr. Palmer?"

came the quiet query, but the eyes seemed to be resting upon the faces of both Will Palmer and Sherman Canfield as the question was asked.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECRET REVEALED.

"LEONARD LONG!"

"Do you know him?" asked Will Palmer, excitedly.

"I know of one who bore the name of Leonard Long, but is now known as Benedict Mildmay," was the quiet response.

"Where is he?"

"In Boston, just now."

"And his wife is here?"

"Yes."

"I would like, with your permission, to see her."

"Now you cannot do so, but later I would wish you to see her."

"It is for that reason I came to see you this afternoon."

"Did she send you here?"

"No."

"She told you I was here?"

"No; she does not know that you are not on your ranch in Texas."

"How was it that you came to seek me?"

"I knew that you were the one I should come to."

"One question now?"

"Yes, Mr. Palmer."

"When did you see Myrtle Maximo, Long or Mildmay, as she may be known?"

"An hour ago."

"Is she happy?"

"Apparently yes, though I think she has some hidden sorrow she fights against."

"What is she to you?"

"One in distress."

"What are you to her?"

"I went as a member of the Press—from the *Herald*, in fact."

"Ah! you are a reporter?"

"No, sir."

"You led her to believe so?"

"I did."

"What are you?"

"A detective."

"Ah! and a woman?"

"I did not say so."

Will Palmer looked puzzled, while Sherman Canfield stepped quickly forward and said:

"Come, you gay young deceiver! Will, don't you know him?"

"Him?"

"Yes, him! I am onto him now, for it has just dawned upon me."

"It is Nat!"

"Oh, Lord! New York Nat?"

"None other!"

"Our Ferret—he the professor in petticoats?"

"He is."

"Incredible!"

"Not at all incredible, Mr. Palmer; I'm the professor," calmly avowed the disguised detective.

"Well, it's all your game! You lead me from start to finish."

"But, I can hardly credit it, yet, as you make a better looking girl than boy."

"That's a question of opinion," laughed Nat, and he added:

"Fine feathers make fine birds, and I know my toilet is a handsome one, for it was all made to order."

"Then this wig, with paint, powder, rouged lips, a pretty bonnet and kid gloves make the cheat perfect—so perfect that I fooled that poor woman, Mrs. Mildmay."

"Poor girl! You have seen her, then?"

"Yes, I went to call on him, to see what kind of a gentleman he was to hobnob with sports of a low order."

"The janitor told me was away, but that his wife was there; so I feed the man and pumped him dry."

"Then I went up and called upon madam,

and I got the story from her, telling her I was a press reporter and wished to give her husband a flattering notice.

"She felt it would please him, for she has nothing to hide, and so she took the bait eagerly.

"She told me of her elopement, that her husband was from Chicago, that he had saved Mr Mildmay's life, and that he intended to wholly ignore his own name and be known only as Mildmay.

"She said she had written to her father and mother—"

"Poor girl!"

"Asking them to forgive her, and that her husband had written a beautiful letter, also, begging them to come on North, at his expense and join them for a month's visit."

"See here Miss Sherm—darn it all. You make me believe I am talking to a woman!

"I mean professor; and I want to know if you think after all that Long can be innocent, and—"

"No!" interrupted Nat, sternly. "He is guilty from beginning to end—a thorough scamp and crook.

"She may have written home, and he also may have written, as she states, but the letters were never sent; rest assured of that, for it is a part of his game to make her believe she is to be cast off by her parents.

"I could see that she was unhappy—that she had found out her husband was not all she had believed and hoped he would be; but she tried to make the most of it and be brave.

"He is Leonard Long, and we have tracked him.

"Now I shall plan for you to see her as soon as the time comes to put the nippers on him. You will have to tell her all, for you are her friend, the one who will have to bear her up in her sorrow, and return her to her home, when she knows the whole bitter truth.

"He will not return for several days, she says, and—"

"Can he have left her already, or suspected trouble and fled?"

"That thought had not entered my mind, but he prepared to go. She has had a letter from him. He wrote for her to send him some money, she said, and in her innocence she told him that she wished he would hurry back and bank the large sum he had there. So he will be back, and while waiting for him I will go on a still hunt in the slums for the Desperado Vampires, who are going to kill me."

Nat returned to his home, and that night heard further reports from his Ferrets of what they had been doing in their search for the Vampires.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TRAPPED FERRET.

NEW YORK NAT left his quarters the next morning early, with every hope of success.

He had put the reports of his different assistants together and come to one conclusion, which was that the place to which the Parson had tracked the two sports was certainly the abiding-place of a score of crooks.

Men went in and out of the saloon continually, and hundreds of men at that; but there were from a dozen to a score who certainly had their home there.

They would go into the saloon, but would not be seen anywhere when the Ferret-spies, as newsboys and bootblacks, went in to look them up.

Putting all reports together Nat was sure that he had found the den of thieves, if not the Vampires' Nest: so he gave his instructions for the next day and told what he intended to do.

He left the quarters as "Professor Herman Spinola," but he went into a place

down-town and emerged from it as a naval apprentice, having on his cap the lettering:

"U. S. S. PORTSMOUTH."

He cruised along the street like a sailor who knew what port he was going into, and at last arrived in a part of the city which it was by no means safe to be in.

Then he brought to anchor in a saloon over the door of which was the sign:

"GOOD CHEER.

"BOB BOWLES,

"Landlord."

The landlord eyed him curiously, saw that he was apparently half-seas-over but seemed not anxious to detain him then, although he treated liberally.

"I tell you no, for I don't like Uncle Sam's sharks to come in here, as they may get me into trouble.

"He is too conspicuous so steer him out into some dive where they want him."

So said Bob Bowles to a man who had seemed to be urging him to do something against his will—Nat meanwhile playing half stupid but hearing all and seeing all.

So he was robbed of five dollars he had in his hand and then was fired out.

After going a short distance Nat quickened his pace and returned to his starting-point to get into some new shape.

"No use in this rig, Shorty. They are afraid of me because I am a supposed U. S. sailor, so I'll have to try the professor rig again."

When Nat sallied forth again, once more he was the "professor," and found himself in the Good Cheer Saloon before very long.

He showed a roll of bills, played half-drunk and confidentially told the landlord that it was his first time on earth, he knew no one in New York, and was looking for a quiet, genteel boarding-place where he would not be robbed, for he had considerable money with him.

That was the very place, the landlord assured him, so he watched his chance and led him out of the saloon by a rear door.

Then the way led down some steps to a basement corridor, along this, which was lighted by a lamp, to what appear to be a brick wall, the Ferret pretending to be maudlin drunk and leaning hard upon the landlord.

But, the brick wall, at a knock from the guide, suddenly raised up and when both passed under it, it was lowered behind them.

They were still in a corridor, narrower than the other, and dimly lighted. Along this passageway they passed for some fifty feet, when they came to a door upon which the landlord gave another mysterious knock.

It was opened by a rough-looking man who cried:

"Hello, Bob, what is it?"

"A pigeon to pluck. Take him, for I must get back to my bar," and Nat was suddenly shoved through the door, which instantly closed behind him.

He very nearly fell down some stone steps, at the bottom of which was a large underground room, where there was a billiard-table, gambling-tables, a bar and a dozen men, smoking, drinking and playing cards.

"Here, pals, Bob Bowles brought this pigeon here to be plucked," said the man, that led Nat forward.

Nat made no resistance.

He felt that he had been too reckless.

Most cleverly and quickly had he been trapped.

To be thus thrust in there, amid that crowd of men he knew meant death to him, for they would never allow him to go out and inform on them after they had robbed him.

To make matters worse he recognized sev-

eral of those present as men whom he knew to be crooks of the worst kind.

He glanced quickly over the crowd as they all pressed around him, and his eyes met those of one whom he had every reason to fear.

It was the small sport whom Will Palmer had warned him against, and whose pard he had killed in the old Rookery, two nights before.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE CHAIR OF DEATH.

"PARDS, I declare he's got a rig on," yelled one of the men, who suddenly snatched the disguise from his head.

"Yes, and a revolver!" cried another, and he made a snatch at the weapon.

But, Nat was too quick for him, and with a bound he was away and up the steps.

But, he was headed off, for he did not know how to open the door, and he was forced to stand at bay.

"Back, all of you, for I will fire!"

"Fire and be blowed to you," cried a man in the rear while the others rushed upon the now cornered youth.

There was a flash and report, and the nearest man dropped, but the others threw themselves upon him, and, in an instant, he was disarmed and dragged back down the steps into the underground hall.

"Men, I know the fellow! It's the one we were looking for—the youngster the captain and all was afraid of:

"It is New York Nat!"

It was the short man who spoke, he whom Nat had recognized.

At this announcement a shout went up.

In that underground den, with the low rumble of wheels overhead, they seemed to have no fear of being heard.

"He will have to die!" cried one.

"He has come right into our den," said another.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Kill him!"

"No, we must wait for the captain to come!"

"Put him in the Execution Chair and that will keep him until death or the captain comes!"

This last suggestion was received with a shout and Nat was dragged by ready and powerful arms back through a stone arched way and thrust into a large seat, like a bishop's chair.

It was massive and was made fast on a raised platform.

As soon as he was seated in it, iron bracelets, fastened to the arms of the chair, were clasped around his wrists.

Then about his arms iron bands were clasped, while around his neck a steel band was fitted closely and made secure through the back of the chair.

"Now leave him there until the captain comes."

"If he don't come in a day or two, Death will."

"And the rats will keep him from being lonesome as soon as night comes."

With these awfully suggestive words, New York Nat was left to his fate, while the rats came about him, as soon as the gang of crooks departed from the arched way in which stood their diabolical contrivance, the Chair of Death.

As the hours passed, New York Nat began to almost despair of rescue, though he had planned with his Ferrets, if he did not return by a certain time, to arrest the landlord and pull the place.

It seemed to Nat, in irons as he was, in darkness, down below the streets, and with scores of loathsome rats running about him, that the hour he had set for his return must have come and passed long before.

Suddenly he heard a loud cheer from the

men in the underground hall. A moment after came a flash of light upon him and a voice said:

"He's alive, captain, if the rats have not eaten him."

There stood a tall form and the face Nat recognized, though he had seen it only in a photograph. The name sprung quickly to his lips:

"Leonard Long, I know you!"

The man started back, even as he cried, savagely:

"Then I will see that you never utter that name again!"

But, as he moved forward, a knife in his hand, there was a wild cry of alarm behind him; pistol shots rung out, and a score of masked men stood in the underground hall, cutting off all retreat.

At the first fire, the tall man addressed as captain by his band, staggered back and moaned:

"At last! Avenge me, Vampires!"

But, the Vampires were too busy trying to protect themselves. Caught like rats in a hole, they cried for mercy, and one by one were called out and put in irons.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CONCLUSION.

THE moment that the masked rescuers entered the underground hall New York Nat knew them as his Ferrets, on the search for him.

A call brought several of them to his side, and he was soon released from the horrible Death Chair, when he asked:

"How did you get in, Keno?"

"We concluded that you had been trapped, and that harm had befallen you, Cap'n Nat, so we patronized the saloon, and gave a hint to those who were there to get out, or they would be pulled."

"They fairly stampeded, and Landlord Bob did not understand it until we had him cornered."

"Then he came to terms and squealed, on condition that we would let him go."

"We agreed, and the saloon doors were closed and he led the way, but he was the man who got killed by the fire of the Vampires. That is all there is to it, except that we had to kill four of the gang."

"But, we feared they had done for you."

"Your coming was all that saved me, and bless you all for it. It was my closest call. But, what time is it, Keno?"

"About midnight."

"Lordy! I thought it was next week."

"Now about these fellows; we must keep them all here in irons, of course locking the doors after us. I will go at once to Mr. Canfield, to have him call up Headquarters and send the officers here to take charge; thus, as before, we will escape being known in the affair, save that the Unknown Ferrets did the work."

"You know they are the Vampires, for the landlord admitted that, and I found out enough from him to tell that they were the worst of crooks on earth."

"I don't doubt it; but I wish to search their captain, for he must not be known as he really is, so I will see if he has anything about him to betray him as Leonard Long alias Benedict Mildmay."

Nat's search revealed enough to cause him to be glad he had made it, and he took with him what he found on the body.

Leaving the prisoners in irons, and believing that they had a guard over them, the Ferrets slipped away, while Nat went with all speed up to the home of Sherman Canfield.

Fortunately he found Canfield and Palmer still up, they having just returned from the theater.

The exciting and important story was soon told.

An hour after the police were in charge of the Good Cheer Saloon, the bodies and the prisoners; and the Secret Service chief owed

another debt to the Unknown Ferrets—the inscrutable Boy Police.

The next morning Will Palmer, accompanied by Olive, the Girl Queen, and New York Nat, called upon "Mrs. Benedict Mildmay," and the poor young wife of the Vampire Crook heard the whole cruel story of just who and what was the man she had married.

Under other circumstances she might have broken completely down, but Will Palmer struck the key-note in urging her to bear up and go home to care for her mother.

This roused her to action, and as she was assured that the cruel secret of who her husband had been was not to be made known, she seemed more resigned. She at once turned all over to New York Nat's keeping, and, to verify all that had been said, he found her mother's and her own jewels, with lots of her father's gold in the strong-box of her crook husband, the keys to which Nat had taken from his body.

So the young widow, the bride of a month, gave up her fine flat, packed up her belongings, and, escorted by Will Palmer, started for her far-Texas home.

"The Texan Tenderfoot has won," said Nat as he bade them good-by at the train.

It was some two weeks after that Nat had a letter from Will Palmer, which stated that they had arrived safely, that he had done the lying for the young widow and had made known that her husband had been killed in New York in a riot, and if the ranchers wished to find Don Maximo's murderer, they must look elsewhere for him than to suspect Myrtle's husband.

Mrs. Maximo was improving fast, for she knew the real truth but had kept the dread secret well.

Soon after, another letter came with a draft payable to Sherman Canfield, but with special instructions for the money to be paid over to New York Nat and his Clan, as a souvenir from Mrs. Maximo. That the Clan rejoiced greatly in this additional sum to swell their treasury we can safely state.

And cheerily, too, they went on with their good work of running down the crooks, under their gallant young leader and Girl Queen, while they still remained, even to the chief of the Secret Service, the Unknown Ferrets—the Secret Boy Police—whose work made them literal Detective Wonders.

THE END.

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